

Major

The Life of Israel McCreight
Banker, Conservationist, Indian Chief
By Tom Schott



A publication of the DuBois Area Historical Society

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**Cover photo:
Major Israel McCreight holding Chief Sitting
Bull's pipe and wearing Chief Rain-In-the-
Face's war bonnet. Photograph by T. A.
McKerron, Salamanca, N. Y., in 1950
outside the Wigwam.
From the M. I. McCreight Collection,
Niagara Fall's Museum
Chet Barnowski, Senior Advisor Native
American Studies, donated a copy to the
DuBois Area Historical Society.**

**For my wife, Virginia,
who daily inspires me.**

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**M. I. McCreight on break from his
banking duties.**

DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

Author's Note

Nearly a decade ago, at the urging of my wife, Virginia, I started to pursue the idea of writing a biography of Major Israel McCreight. "Someone needs to do this before he is forgotten," she said about a man she only knew by reputation while growing up in DuBois.

Truthfully, I didn't know much about McCreight, not being a DuBois native, my knowledge coming from reading brief paragraphs about his involvement in DuBois history. I recalled McCreight's name coming up during a question and answer session following a speaker's presentation at a DuBois Area Historical Society meeting. The comment went something like this, "He was just a blowhard, trying to make himself look good." Where such an opinion came from remains a mystery.

I tried to enter the project with an open mind despite the conflicting ideas: "someone who should not be forgotten" or a "blowhard".

After several years of research about Major Israel McCreight, I have found him a complex and evasive man. He was a voluminous writer and correspondent, so there is much material directly from him to review.

Readers of his works, particularly those Israel wrote about his own life, could accuse him of overemphasizing himself. These writings, scattered through numerous publications were meant to be autobiographical. His views dominate, and in the end need to be trusted, if for no other reason, because he was there as a first-hand observer.

Because M. I. wrote much of the information years after he experienced it by relying on memory, he fails to include specific dates and in some cases names. I believe in the latter omissions were purposely skipped to spare hurt feelings among his contemporaries or their descendants; and part of

this tact may just be the honest way he tried to live his life.

Not that McCreight didn't have a hard side; reflected in his activities in the West and his pugilistic defense of his own bank in DuBois. However, he comes across as a loving husband and father and in later life is called a "sucker" for little kids.

Israel was also a man of his convictions. Stubborn, when he had his mind made up, he could accept a challenge and battle long and hard to see an outcome that satisfied him. His involvement in the preservation of Cook Forest is just one example.

Honesty was his best quality. People could rely on his word, something very apparent in the affection Native Americans demonstrated for the man they called Tchanta Tanka. McCreight believed deals could be completed with a handshake, not paperwork, and liked to stand up for the underdog or little man. Several times he was surprised to find public reaction against him, when he felt he was doing the right thing, breaking no laws, and taking no personal profit.

Members of McCreight's own family would state that they never quite understood him. The mark of a true eccentric, I would suppose.

The DuBois newspaper called McCreight DuBois' "First Citizen" at the time of his death. He earned that reputation for without him, DuBois might have been a far different place.

Tom Schott

Part 1: Westerner

April 1865 was a rollercoaster month of emotional extremes unlike any before or since in United States history.

On April 9, the Army of Northern Virginia under the command of Robert E. Lee surrendered to the Army of the Potomac commanded by Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia. Less than three weeks later, April 23, Joe Johnston's Army of Tennessee, surrendered to William T. Sherman, commanding the Military Division of the Mississippi, ending for all but a few remaining skirmishes the United States Civil War.

The Northern jubilation over Appomattox, turned to mourning on Good Friday, April 14, with the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln by John Wilkes Booth.

A week later, April 21, Lincoln's funeral train left Washington, D.C., on its circuitous 1,654-mile route back to Springfield, Illinois. It followed basically the same route as the then president-elect had used when coming to Washington, D.C., in 1860, with the exception of cutting out Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Cincinnati, Ohio.

The train made two stops in Pennsylvania. In Harrisburg on Saturday, April 22, at 10 a.m., 40,000 people lined the streets to watch the hearse carrying Lincoln's coffin back to the railroad depot. The train moved on to Philadelphia, where viewing was held in Independence Hall, that evening by invitation only and the next day to the general public. People in a double line waited up to five hours to view the open coffin.

While the Union portion of the still badly divided nation was in mourning on April 22, there was reason for rejoicing in Jefferson County in Western Pennsylvania. John and Eliza (Uncapher) McCreight, welcomed the fourth of their six

children, Israel, into the world.

According to the 1888 *History of Jefferson County* edited by Kate M. Scott, John McCreight, a farmer, was born in Armstrong County on July 11, 1821, the son of Andrew and Ann (Sharp) McCreight. He settled in Winslow Township in 1832. John assisted in clearing and improving the farm in Winslow Township and settled on the farm where Israel was born in 1865.

McCreight married Eliza Uncapher, a daughter of Adam and Susannah (Ludwick) Uncapher of Greensburg, Pennsylvania, in 1851. He was later known around the region as “Honest John” and in the future he would be elected justice of the peace. It is claimed that he never had a docket or a trial but adjudicated disputes without a formal hearing or accepting a fee.

By all indications “Honest John” passed that trait on to his children. Young Israel, who would become a bank executive, treated his customers with respect. Many of his major business deals were sealed only with a handshake. He was also a champion of causes, advocating Native American rights during a time period when that was not a popular stance. In addition, he was in the forefront of conservation issues.

Two of John McCreight’s brothers, Sharp, who was born on January 10, 1815, and Thomas, who was born on April 25, 1830, and is listed in the 1888 *History of Jefferson County* as president of the Jefferson County Live Stock Insurance Company, also lived in Winslow Township. Sharp and Thomas are listed as living on the farm owned by Thomas. Sharp and Jane (Johnson) McCreight and Thomas and Frances (McKee) McCreight. Each family had six children.

Six appears to be the prevailing number for children among the McCreights. Young Israel already had an older sister, Susan, and two older brothers, Joseph and William. Later, another brother, Bruce, and a sister, Lillian, would swell his siblings to five. With 12 cousins also in the vicinity, there

were plenty of young people for him to be with during his formative years.

Six other children born to John and Eliza McCreight died early in life. It is Israel, however, who would leave his personal stamp on the area where he was born for the next 93 years.

In later years, Israel McCreight completed his own investigation of his ancestry, resulting in a 13-page pamphlet, *Who Are The McCreights*, published by Nupp Printing of Sykesville, Pennsylvania.

McCreight reported that the first record of the name “McCraight” was in Ireland. The records he examined indicated the surname existed before the 13th Century and that the coat of arms was borne by the family prior to 1483, when the college of arms was established and when records were first kept.

“The spelling of the name would prove that the pronouncement is the sound of a and not i as in McCrate—not McCrite,” he writes on page one of his findings.

A relative, Mary B. McCreight of Dorchester, Massachusetts, reported that the McCreights were of Scotch origin and lived in Northern Ireland up until the time they began coming to America in the 1750s. Sometime during that arrival, McCraight became McCreight.

“From my own recollections of what our father told us, the first to come to America was James whose wife had died before coming – sometime about 1770; he married again and raised a family – then that wife died and he re-married and raised another flock, so, that the name became widely scattered from these half brothers and sisters,” recalled Israel McCreight. “From one of these descendants a James seems to have settled somewhere in what is now Indiana County, and a son Andrew became the grandfather of the writer. He migrated to Jefferson County in 1832 – his wife being Ann Sharp the daughter of Captain Andrew Sharp, who was killed by the

Indians in 1794 – buried with honors of war at Fort Pitt. He had served under Washington at King’s Bridge and elsewhere, in the Revolution. The writer is nobody other than one of his great grandsons.”

Israel’s parents, John and Eliza, both had a long history of military commitments in their family. Both could have easily qualified to belong to either the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) or the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). McCreight ancestors served in every war from the Revolution to the Civil War.

That family military service resulted in the nickname, “Major,” becoming part of young Israel’s life. Israel was named in honor of one of his mother’s uncles, Israel Uncapher, who was known as Major Uncapher in his hometown of Greensburg. He was born on Jan. 10, 1824 in Greensburg and died Feb. 17, 1875, in Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania.

Israel Uncapher fought in two wars. In the Mexican War, he served under Division Commander Winfield Scott, enlisting in Company E, Second Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers, known as the "Westmoreland Guard", on Dec. 24, 1846, and mustered in on Jan. 1, 1847 in Pittsburgh. He mustered out on July 14, 1848, having reached the rank of 4th corporal with a promotion given on May 1, 1848.

A practicing lawyer in Greensburg, Israel Uncapher left home again to fight in the Civil War. He enrolled Oct. 14, 1861, and mustered in October 25, 1861, in Company I of the 11th Pennsylvania Reserves. He was promoted to 1st lieutenant on March 10, 1862, to adjutant-general Nov. 28, 1862, and later to major. Little did Uncapher know what an influence his military rank would have on his great nephew.

The McCreight neighbors, knowing about the connection between his name and that of “Major” Uncapher, called the infant major too. The nickname stuck and Israel McCreight became Major Israel McCreight or M.I. Reflecting back on

the unusual nickname he carried the rest of his life, McCreight wrote about himself in *Who Are The McCreights?*:

“Yet the only military service he rendered his country was raising the army in World War I – and the settlement of a threatened outbreak of Indians in ’85. The title of Chief of the Sioux, in a big ceremony with Buffalo Bill as witness, was a far greater tribute than any that could be conferred by any president of military organization. It was an honor to be made a member of the G.A.R. which was done by the old soldiers of the Civil War. He was also, in later years adopted into the Mohawk Tribe.”

Young McCreight would grow up in the wilderness that was Northwestern Pennsylvania during the later 1800s. Jefferson County was still relatively young, as counties go, being created in 1804 from a portion of Lycoming County and named for the president of the United States at that time, Thomas Jefferson. Reynoldsville was the largest community in Winslow Township, Jefferson County.

In his autobiography, *Autobiography 70 Year Record*, published in 1957, just two-years before his death, McCreight stated that his memories began at the age of five when his schooling began. He walked two miles through the forest in deep snow to get to the now long-closed McCreight School.

Schooling was different during those years. McCreight would load a sack of wheat from the granary, sling it over an old mare and ride to town where it would sell for a dollar at the mill. Then he would go to the store to buy books to enable him to go to school.

At the age of eight, a Dr. Gibson presented McCreight with a battered silver watch, which was worthless as a timepiece. It lay around the house for months until the boy slipped it into his pocket, got an excuse from older brothers to

get a box of caps for the rifle and walked four miles, alone, through snow to town. Visiting Black's book store he attempted to trade the watch for books. The proprietor suggested trying the jewelry store across the street to see if they would buy the watch. The jeweler opened the case – took a glance at it, stripped the case from its entrails, and laid it on the scales. He offered one dollar and ten cents for the case because the works were worth nothing at all.

The boy jumped at the opportunity, accepted the fortune and returned to the bookstore. The manager picked two books, *Pilgrim's Progress* and a small history of the United States, from the limited library and sold them to McCreight for the dollar. He used the remaining dime to purchase the caps for the rifle and headed home.

McCreight's new books created a sensation at home, until they asked how he obtained the money for the purchase. The explanation was not well received and he was criticized and condemned for parting with the present. The memory of the incident lived on through McCreight's life. He wrote, "Crushed; the books were laid aside – never read. That rebuff lasted for three quarters of a century – *Pilgrim's Progress* is still tabu to the writer."

The town McCreight walked to was Reynoldsville borough. It was originally an Indian village. The last Indian family to leave were the Johns, who were still around in 1824. By 1830, just a few years ahead of the arrival of the McCreights, the men who came to be the founders of Reynoldsville moved from opposite sides of the state and settled in Winslow Township.

Thomas Reynolds Sr. lived about two miles east of what is now Reynoldsville, but he owned all the land in what is now the eastern portion of the town. Woodward Reynolds, no relation to Thomas, bought all the land that is now the business portion of the town and lived there. Woodward married Amelia Ross from Kittanning and their son, David, born in

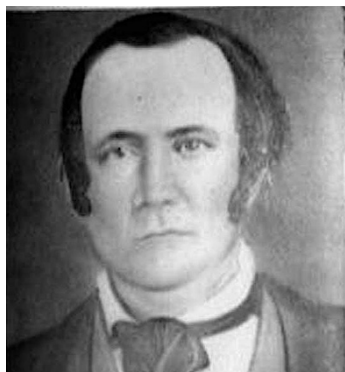
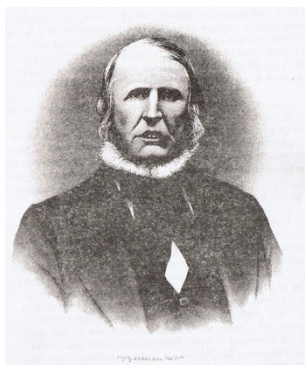
1837, was the first white (non-Indian) child born in Reynoldsville.

Thomas Reynolds suggested that the place be called Reynoldsville, and in 1850 the Post Office Department confirmed the suggestion.

In the beginning, most of the business and social life in Reynoldsville was dependent on the stagecoach and its traffic that passed along the main road through the area. That changed about 1847 when Woodward Reynolds opened the first coal mine in Jefferson County and the first in that section of the state, prompting a great growth in Reynoldsville.

The area's other major industry became lumbering. In 1860, Pennsylvania led the nation in lumber production. Winslow Township had acres of woodlands rich in maple, hickory, hemlock, white oak, beech and other valuable trees. Once Sandy Lick Creek was cleared of overhanging trees and debris there was a way to send the product to market.

The trees were cut, formed into rafts and sent down the Clarion River to the Allegheny River and then on to Pittsburgh. In the case of the area near Reynoldsville and Soldier, the logs started on the Sandy Lick and connected to Redbank Creek before reaching the Clarion River and heading



Thomas Reynolds (left) and Woodward Reynolds (right). They were not related.

DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

south to Pittsburgh.

The first large saw mill near Reynoldsville was the Smith Mill, built in 1865. It was located on Sandy Lick Creek, a mile and a half below the town.

McCreight recalled going to town to see Whispering John Smith to learn how to put on a bristle to a wax-end for sewing leather patches on worn out boots. It is a shoemaker's art to make a wax thread, and more so to attach a hog-bristle to its end. This skill McCreight learned well and he repaired old shoes and boot tops and soles on the family's little shoe bench with its squares of tacks and wooden pegs and row of awls and beeswax balls for making thread and the flat and hammer for driving pegs in half-soles. The bench, home-made, had a seat of leather stretched over a large round hole in the wood frame.

By the age of eight, Israel McCreight went to work with his father and older brothers in the big pine forest that covered most of the family farm. Lumbering was the only way to get money for taxes and to buy other staples of life, such as sugar, which could not be produced on the farm. Young Israel drove a yoke of big red oxen to haul pine logs from the woods to the mills. He recalled using the first money he earned to buy a \$14 overcoat.

Logging was hard, physical labor, which built boys into men at a quick rate. The time Israel McCreight spent in the forests led him to one of his future interests, conservation. Surely, he did not know that the forests he helped to fell as a youth were virgin and irreplaceable. But, by the early 1900s, he was one of the leaders in the battle to preserve the last virgin timber in Jefferson County's Cook Forest.

Writing in *Theodore Roosevelt and Conservation Why*, McCreight reviewed, "Looking backward over a period of 50 years from the present, it was a sad and terrifying spectacle in

American history; one wonders why a thoughtful and progressive people would tolerate it.”

The job of the lumberman in the late 1800s was a laborious, slow, and dangerous profession. They felled the trees, made them square for rafting, then hauled them to the water. Their tools consisted of the gin, a machine for hoisting heavy objects; cross-cut saw; broad axe and double bit; wedges made of iron and others hand-made; the cant-hook, a pole with a moveable hooked arm at one end; and maul, a type of heavy hammer.

Crosscut saws and axes felled the trees. After a tree was fallen a man with a broadax would cut a straight line on the top side of the log by slightly hitting the log and moving along the full length with a repetitive action, creating a mark along the entire length. A double headed chopping axe would then be used to cut V notches on top of the log, the depth up to the marking line at approximately 18 to 20 inches apart along the length of the line. Next, a broadax was used to cut or pare off the wood on this side in a rough manner. A second pass was made to true up and smooth the face cut. Slab wood, with the bark on were called juggles when produced that way.

The log was then turned over using the gin and the process repeated until the log was squared. When enough timber had been cut and squared, it was hauled to the creek by an ox team on the crude “devils” sled and floated down the river to market.

In his autobiography, McCreight wrote that his father cut the largest pine in the state. The tree was squared at the length of 50 feet and its face at base measured 42 and 44 inches. Six teams of horses and oxen were used to drag it to the creek. The log was claimed to be the largest stick of square timber ever floated down the Sandy Lick and Redbank to the Allegheny River and on to Pittsburgh.

Once it arrived in Pittsburgh the log caused a sensation. There was no lumber mill large enough to process the log, but

it was purchased for \$300 and sent down the Ohio River to Cincinnati, Ohio, where it was sawn into shiplap used in the construction of barns, sheds, outbuildings and in inexpensive or seasonal homes. McCreight did not recall any money coming into his father's hands for his effort.

Others in the area recognized the achievement. Dorothy Quinlan Waldsmith, M. I.'s niece, wrote recollections of the family at the website www.manycoups.net. Her experiences with the family were extensive including living with her grandparents (M. I.'s parents) during her first two years in DuBois' Second Ward School and long summer visits. She recalls being shown what she termed "a gigantic stump," by the side of the road near Reynoldsville. The stump included a marker reading, "Felled by Honest John McCreight and Wes Murphy."

McCreight reported that he never saw so much as a silver dollar between the ages of eight and 16. He recalls the food coming from the field and garden and from the forest by hunting. He used an old Kentucky rifle to bag squirrels, pheasants, and wild pigeons. It was also a boy's job to shoot the groundhogs, dig them out of their holes, skin them, and tan the hides.

In addition to working in the woods, Israel participated in the farming, where the youngest didn't get the easiest of jobs.

Farming started with a burning-clearing day. A three- or four-acre clearing had to be made where the previous year's hard work of chopping the timber trees, which were used for fence rails or sent to the sawmill or made into boards and shingles for new buildings, had been completed.

Brush and small litter were piled in preparation for the big burning time. On a clear day without too much wind fires were started in several places at once. Men and boys stationed at

intervals guarded against the acres of roaring flames spreading into adjoining timber or crop fields.

If the burning was successful, log-rolling day followed. Neighbors gathered with their teams of horses or oxen to join in the hauling of burned logs, stumps and roots into log-heaps for final burning in readiness for the plow, and putting in of the crop of fall-wheat. In the process rails had been split from the big red-oak logs, and when the plowing began, the final fencing of the new field was carried on, until completely enclosed.

Thickly interspersed with stumps of the big timber trees, the putting in of the new wheat crop was a tough job. McCreight wrote: "We recall having had this to do with a team of big red oxen – Buck and Berry were the names of the giant red brutes! Their yoke was heavy enough for two men to lift and a long log-chain leading from the yoke ring to the plow made the load still heavier. And when the plow struck a root something had to give; usually it was the fellow who held the plow-handles. Sometimes jerked high into the air, or a side-swipe that knocked him out of the furrow."

At age ten, McCreight learned tree grafting from a cousin, Tom Niel. Grafts were cut early in the fall or spring and laid aside to grafting time in April. A knife with a wedge at one end, a sharp cutting edge in the middle, and a hand-hold loop on the other end was the main tool. A slit was made and the neatly trimmed grafts placed inside, held in place by a mixture of beeswax and tallow.

Threshing also came in the fall with a circular power-plane powered by teams of horses used to run a cylinder. The sheaves were fed into the machine followed by boys mowing back the straw that remained, a job, which created large amounts of lung-choking dust.

Other farm-related jobs included hauling manure from the barn-shed where it had been tramped over all winter and cutting and shucking corn. McCreight once completed 100

shucks in one day. He even found time in the summer of 1876 to be the only helper on the construction of a new school house by Fred Walker of Stump Creek.

The work also made the boy strong. McCreight recalled having the first of two physical altercations of his life (the second came as an adult and will be related later) while hauling lumber to town.

“On such a trip Jack Wilt hurled a sass word at the crude outfit from the country,” McCreight wrote. “He was bigger too, but wrath come fast, the boy dropped his lines over the brake of the stripped wagon, jumped out and slugged the enemy one hard lick in the jaw, climbed back into his wagon and drove on. Jack never tried a second attack.”

Fourteen-year-old Israel also experienced what he termed a miracle, the first but not the only time he would escape an accidental death. He was packing shingles at the sawmill located at the border of the McCreight farm, earning money to buy new shoes. The steam boiler used to run the equipment exploded. Half of the firebox caught on the timber of the upper floor. But, a 2' x 4' section flew over the boy's head just as he stooped to bind a bunch of finished shingles or he might have been decapitated.

The fireman, who was operating the firebox, was not as lucky. He was blown 150 feet to the top of a board pile in the yard. All his clothes blown off his body except the wristbands of the shirt. The rest of the boiler firebox landed in a pine tree fully 250 feet away. “It was a terrible sight to witness the suffering of the fireman who lived an hour,” remembered McCreight.

Despite the challenges of his early years, McCreight, as an adult, looked back at the experience as “outstanding work for a 14-year-old lad.” However, he longed for something better and was determined to do something about it.

When he was 16-years-old Israel McCreight demanded the right to go to Eastman Business College in Poughkeepsie, New York. What prompted his interest in business or in the Eastman Business College in particular is unknown, but he was determined to pursue his goal.

Going off to college at his age at that time seems unusual to readers of the modern era, where 12 years of school are completed before college is even considered. But it should be noted that future President Theodore Roosevelt, born five years earlier than Israel McCreight, albeit from a more prosperous family, also left for college at Harvard at the age of 16.

Eastman Business College was very new, founded only 17 years previously in 1859 by Harvey Gridley Eastman (1832-78). He had previously opened a commercial school in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1855. In addition to being an educator, Eastman was elected to the New York assembly in 1871 and 1873, and served three terms as the mayor of Poughkeepsie where he supported many public improvements.

Originally an all-male school, that eventually opened its doors to women, Eastman Business College had an inscription over an archway reading, "Teach your BOYS that which they will PRACTICE when they become MEN." One pupil made up the first class, but in a short time it grew to include 1,600 students in five buildings with a faculty of over 60 instructors.

Sending Israel to college was a sacrifice for his family. He reported that a young horse and a couple of steers were sold and family members tapped their savings to come up with the \$110 needed to pursue his goal.

No doubt the now 17-year-old Israel carried the weight of his family on his shoulders when he boarded the train in April 1882 for the trip to Poughkeepsie. The train took him to Philadelphia, on to New York City, and then north along the Hudson River to Poughkeepsie.

Rail travel was just coming into vogue and was a little easier in the east. The south remained devastated from the Civil War and the transcontinental railroad had only recently been completed.

McCreight carried a heavy carpet bag, with an extra suit of new clothes, and a basket of food – boiled eggs, pickles, and sandwiches. That train trip was his first step into the wider world. He spent it sitting in the day coach, sleeping sitting up when possible, during the entire trip.

Arriving in New York City, he took a horse drawn cab, relying on the driver to take him to meet a local train headed for Poughkeepsie. Having arrived, he needed to find the school. “Inquiry where to find the place – far away on the hill – far up and very steep,” McCreight wrote. “That heavy bag was toted all the way up that interminable mountain street. Exhausted, he finally read the sign a block to the north. Staggering on, he finally entered the sacred office.”

The new experience wasn’t over yet for the young man. Once he was duly registered, he was told that he would board in a home over a mile in the opposite direction from which he had just come. He shared a room on the third floor with another Eastman student and fellow Pennsylvanian, Grant Cubbison.

Israel threw himself into his studies. He later noted that he



Israel McCreight, Age 17

Courtesy of Peoplepill.com

paid attention to little else but his school work during his time at Eastman, but did recall taking a steam boat trip down the Hudson to West Point with a stop at Newberg, New York, to see George Washington's headquarters.

His efforts were rewarded in August 1882, when he received his diploma. McCreight had completed his studies in four months, the shortest time anyone had spent at Eastman, and became the youngest to ever graduate from the institution.

McCreight had to await money from home to pay for his train ticket home. This time he proceeded west to Niagara Falls, where he had a chance to visit the falls, and then south, perhaps to Driftwood, before making the last leg to home.

Like many young, educated graduates, McCreight, filled with new knowledge, was ready to conquer the world. Instead, he found himself back on the farm doing the same chores that he had sought an education to escape. That lasted through the winter, but by the spring of 1883, he went to Reynoldsville to seek a job.

The search was successful with McCreight being hired as a clerk in Fuller General Store, accepting \$20 per month and board. Fuller store, a 40 x 100-foot, two-story brick structure, occupied the street corner where the bank was located. It was the general store of its time period, carrying everything from clothing to food to farm machinery.

McCreight, in spite of his business degree, was assigned the duty of having the store swept out each morning before 7 a.m. This was probably not the duty a teenager with a business degree expected.

The store had a connecting door to the bank and McCreight would visit the cashier, eventually helping him to balance the books and count the cash, something he had been educated to do. After six weeks he was promoted from his initial job to working in the clothing section of the store. A month later, his interest in the bank found him in a new job as the assistant cashier, for the same \$20 per month salary, but

with more leisure time. A career path was set.

Two years into the banking job, McCreight, like most young men of any time, grew restless. A bank partner, who returned with grand stories from Colorado, fired up McCreight's desire to go west. His decision was made more difficult because he had to leave behind his future wife, Alice Humphrey, who was still in school.

The future Mrs. McCreight, was born Alice Humphrey on December 9, 1867, in Richardsville, Pennsylvania. She was a daughter of Civil War veteran Richard Humphrey and Mary (Slack) Humphrey. Both the Humphreys and the Slacks were pioneers and widely prominent in the Colonial records.

The couple met when Israel was 13 and Alice was 11. Israel was tasked with delivering a half-bushel of apples from his home to the Humphreys. A picket fence separated him from the green-eyed, tussle-hair girl on the other side. Carrying the bag across a road, he heaved it over the fence to her and stopped to watch.

Watching became gallantry when he offered to help Alice get the bag to her house. But there was spunk in the young miss. She refused his help and hauled the bag on her own.

From such a meeting came a romance that would last the rest of their lives. It was a case of love – for both. He could not forget her. She reported to her sister that she had found her “fellow”.

Both of them demonstrated a competitive nature. That competition appeared again during a spelling bee. McCreight, who had a reputation as the best speller in the area, was bested by Humphrey. The defeat was followed by a game of “tap,” a 19th Century version of spin the bottle. The blindfolded McCreight was in the middle of a ring formed by the rest of the competitors. Alice entered and tapped him. If he could

catch her, he won a kiss.

Catch her, he did, or perhaps she wanted to be caught. McCreight wrote that that kiss was to last the rest of their lives. The attraction between them withstood his trip east for education, and they found each other frequently at Fuller General Store after Israel returned home. There, Alice bought dress goods and laces. Sometimes her favorite clerk saw her home.

Things changed when the Humphreys moved to Reedsville, Pennsylvania, so Alice could attend an academy. She studied hard and went on buggy rides with suitors. The smitten McCreight, no doubt hearing about his rivals, hired a horse and buggy to take a two-day trip to visit her.

Possibly, the rivalry for her affection was another motivation for teen-aged Israel's desire to go west. Now a man of 18, he boarded a train again, this time headed west toward the end of the line. Traveling was not easy at that time; a six-inch hole in the window let in showers of cinder and smoke. When he reached his destination, he was not entirely alone, his saddle horse, Davy, was shipped in the settler's car.

An article by Marben Graham about McCreight in the July 31, 1956, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* offered a different take on McCreight's decision.

Graham wrote: "It was 72 years ago when M.I. – he grew to detest his nickname "Maje", uses only his initials – headed West to "kill an Indian" and get some free land.

"His grudge against Indians came from the fact Indians had in 1794 killed his grandfather, Captain Andrew Sharp, a Revolutionary War soldier, near what is now Apollo, Pa."

The Burge Family Genealogies – Ancestries and Histories of Our Lives by Lynette Burge tells the story of what is called, "The Massacre of Captain Sharp." The story was related by Sharp's daughter, Mrs. Hannah Leason, to her grand-nephew, William Moorhead.

Capt. Andrew Sharp was an officer in the Revolutionary

War serving under George Washington. He, with his wife and infant child, immigrated to the area near Shelocta, Pennsylvania, in what is now Indiana County in 1784, and purchased a farm. Ten years later, in the spring of 1794, he traded his farm for one in Kentucky, where he felt his children would get a better education.

He and a traveling party of 20 people, including his wife and six children, either built or purchased a flatboat to go down the Kiskiminetes and Allegheny rivers to Pittsburgh and then on to Kentucky. Low water slowed their progress and they stopped at the mouth of Two Mile Run, below the present site of Apollo, Pennsylvania. There they encountered seven Indians while ashore.

The women and children made it back to the flatboat. Sharp was attempting to get a canoe in the water when the Indians opened fire and shot off Sharp's right eyebrow in the first volley. He received additional bullet-wounds in his left and right sides, shot and killed an Indian, and managed to get the canoe to the flatboat. The flatboat became trapped in a whirlpool for two and a half hours with the Indians continuing to fire into it. The Indians eventually killed two of the men and trailed the boat for 12 miles before giving up the pursuit. The party made it to Pittsburgh where Sharp died on July 8, 1794, forty days after he was wounded.

If McCreight was attempting to avenge his ancestor that quickly changed when he arrived at Devils Lake in present day North Dakota, the end of the railroad line in 1883. The trip took several days starting with a ride to Driftwood in Cameron County where he transferred to the Pennsylvania Railroad going to Meadville; then boarded a Pennsylvania and Northwestern train to Erie and on to Chicago, Illinois. In Chicago, he transferred to a Burlington train to St. Paul,

Minnesota.

The final run was on a St. Paul & Manitoba line to Devils Lake, a booming railroad town along the strategic northern shore of Devils Lake. In reality the town was platted by a syndicate, which included a private investment by the St. Paul & Manitoba railroad owner, James J. Hill. Such efforts stymied the development of other town sites, basically guaranteeing a monopoly on business in the town.

In 1941, Nupp Printing Company published M.I. McCreight's *Go West Young Man*. The 47-page book is a recollection of his time in the Dakotas. In the book, a fictional Mudge McCracken, who had graduated in the shortest time and the youngest on record from Poughkeepsie Business College, left his employment at Fuller store to go west.

The book is illustrated with photos of the McCreight family, M.I., and Alice Humphrey. He later wrote in a letter that he had not written it for circulation, but for his family, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, but received



**Indians unloading buffalo bones, 1885, at
Devils Lake, Dakota Territory.**

From *Buffalo Bone Days* by M. I. McCreight

numerous requests for copies of the booklet from friends in banking and in the west.

It didn't take long for McCreight to see his first Indians, Sioux, who had come to watch the train arrive in Devils Lake. He was approached by a chief in gala dress, who extended his hand and said, "how cola," half-frightening the arriving youth. He also saw a large pile of whitened bones. He did not understand the bones until an Indian told him they were buffalo bones awaiting shipment. He didn't realize it at the time but he was looking at a part of his future.

In another of his books about his time in the west, *Buffalo Bone Days*, published in 1939 by Nupp Printing, McCreight writes about the Indians he first met:

"Indians had killed his own great-grandfather and carried on a war of extermination against his forebears in Pennsylvania in the old days. That kindly greeting by the old Sioux Chief quickly dispelled much of the prejudice that had filled his heart throughout childhood, and soon the youth began to think that Indians were not such terrible folks as Eastern people believe they were."

In *Go West Young Man* McCreight described Devils Lake in this fashion:

"The new town lay sprawled on the gentle slope of the north shore of the big lake, her streets still bore their margins of original prairie sod along the wooden side walks in the business section, and her homes were of bungalow pattern of lumber, showing hasty construction. They were scattered about seemingly without regard to streets, lanes, or alleys, reminding the easterner of a kind of toy town, since it occupied so small a part of the great plains area spreading beyond vision. The business section was one bloc; both sides of it were closely built up with frame structures of one story, except the hotel which was double width and height, and each alternate front carries a canvas sign on which was painted in large black letters S A L O O N."

The town also included farm machinery depots, livery stables, lumber sheds, a land office, a private bank, many real estate agents, loan agencies and a courthouse. Steamboats carried freight and passengers on the lake.

To the south was the government Indian reservation. These Indians were what remained of those who followed Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Red Cloud, some of whom had wiped out General George Custer's 7th Cavalry at the Little Big Horn in 1876.

McCreight found employment, hired by Sam Dodd and Johnny Moore, first as a stable hand caring for a horse for the James J. Hill Fat Stock Show and before the end of the day, when they learned of his bank experience and business degree, promoting him to run the financial side of their business. This included a bank, meat market, a stable renting horses and transportation equipment, a hundred-acre corral, and a slaughter house.

For \$50 per month and board, McCreight was in charge of the office, paid bills, collected bills, supervised up to a dozen employees, conducted trade with the military garrison at the fort, and had the responsibility for all dealings with the Indians, including the purchase of buffalo bones and furnishing supplies to the mission at the Sioux reservation. For roommates, Israel lived with Van Lew and the Hoover boys. The quartet went hunting and fishing and evidently did some partying, because McCreight reported dancing with May, the town "peach", which may have been an attempt at forgetting the girl he left behind.

However, Alice and Israel corresponded throughout his time in the west. Letters survive from Israel's end to attest to the fact. The enduring terms he used for the young lady reflected his true feelings.

This large conglomeration of businesses McCreight worked for was owned by James J. Hill (1838-1916), who became known as “Empire Builder”. As a businessman, Hill falls in the historical category of a robber-baron, in the same company as John Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, and Jay Gould. All became among the richest men of the Gilded Age. Regardless of the opinion of how they obtained their money or used it, they could also be classified as the leaders in the economic development of the United States from ocean to ocean.

Hill’s domain was the Midwest and the railroad was his key to fame and riches. The completion of the transcontinental railroad between 1865 and 1869 powered the United States from a regional to a national economy. Those who controlled the railroad lines would control the money and the growth.

At the turn of the century, Hill used his business skills to merge the Northern Pacific Railroad (today the Northern Pacific is part of Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway

Co.) with other railroads and formed the Northern Securities Company, in control of one-quarter of the railroad lines in the United States. By 1910, Hill was one of the most famous men in the U.S. and was worth \$53,000,000. He was also an informal advisor to President William Howard Taft.

His wealth was gained by hard work; emphasis on



James J. Hill, Age 35
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

competitive, quality service; concern for customers; ability to master new business quickly; leadership in the business community; and building up the population around his railroad.

Born in Ontario, Canada, he had only nine years of formal education, but four of those years were high school quality so he was proficient in algebra, geometry, land surveying, and English. Like McCreight, Hill's first job was as a clerk in a general store at the age of 15, where he learned double-entry bookkeeping. He left Canada for good in 1856 traveling to New York City, Philadelphia, and Chicago, before arriving in St. Paul, Minnesota, on July 21.

He found work with Borup & Champlin, wholesale grocers and forwarding and commission merchants, becoming knowledgeable in the freight and transportation business. He also worked on his own account winning bids to supply feed to horses at the local U.S. fort and wood to steamboats and railroads. By 1865, Hill was in business for himself as the freight and passenger agent for the Northwest Packet Company and the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad. He built a large, all-weather warehouse beside the river with railroad tracks through it, gaining control of the terminal facilities of the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad.

In 1870, Hill realized that the time period of independent transportation agents was ending; thus, he started a steamboat business on the Red River, and established a monopoly in two years. Nearly simultaneously he became involved in the coal business. The money from these two enterprises would enable him to enter the railroad business. He was also in the banking business for the first time as a member of the boards of several leading banks.

During the Panic of 1873 the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad went bankrupt and was placed in receivership. Hill studied the situation and in 1877 formed a group, later dubbed The Associates, which on May 23, 1879, formed the St. Paul,

Minneapolis, & Manitoba Railway Company with Hill as general manager. The improvements he initiated helped the railroad prosper, and by November 1885, the Associates had a balance of \$25,000,000.

When McCreight arrived at Devils Lake, Hill's sphere of influence had expanded from St. Paul to the Dakotas. Hill realized that his railroad would get settlers to the land they would purchase from him, due to the railroad's land grants, and would continue to use his railroad for shipping and the other services that were provided through the businesses employing McCreight.

Hill became a major influence on McCreight's life, so much so that Hill's name shows up in the same sentence with the name John DuBois when McCreight wrote his history of DuBois. He corresponded with Hill when he was writing *Buffalo Bone Days*, seeking the total tonnage of buffalo bones sold, only to find the records were lost in a fire. In later years McCreight praised Hill for his conservation convention speeches. Hill's business practices showed up later in DuBois when the banker McCreight branched out into coal and the effort to bring a railroad into DuBois.

McCreight also learned from his dealings with the men and officers of the garrison. He heard their tales and watched their efforts to control the Indians. Because he bought buffalo bones from the Indians he got to hear about their problems and observed them first hand.

He found the Native Americans starving and poorly clothed during the severe Dakota winters where temperatures reached as much as 48 degrees below zero, with many days at 20 to 30 below zero. He observed a squaw struggling with half-wild hogs to retrieve entrails from a beef so she could feed her children, and watched a man fish all day through a hole in the ice to catch a single pickerel.

This was a far cry from a few years earlier when the now almost non-existent buffalo supported the Indians. Sitting

Bull's people ate, on average, six buffalo per year per person during their dominance of the plains.

More insight came from McCreight's new acquaintances: Sioux Chief Little Fish from the Cut Head Reservation, Chief Little Shell of the Chippewa, and Wanata II, a descendant of Wanata I, once head chief of all the Sioux and perhaps the most powerful Indian in North America at that time.

Wanata rapidly became McCreight's friend coming semi-monthly from the reservation for the good tobacco McCreight provided. The old Indian kept his status well-hidden, revealing to his white friend the old parchment, signed by himself and government officials, that proclaimed Wanata the head chief. Eventually, the old chief presented McCreight with his red-stone pipe and a beaded pouch, which may have been the first items in what would become a large collection of Indian artifacts, which would be displayed at his future DuBois home named the Wigwam.

Go West Young Man is filled with recollections including a saloon shooting, a murder trial, hazardous weather, and Indians. Highlighting it are descriptions of the bone trade, the prevention of an Indian uprising, and surviving a blizzard.

The bone trade was a major influence on the future conservation leader, so much so that he wrote about it several times including in *Buffalo Bone Days* and *The Authentic Story of the Buffalo*. The buffalo bone trade lasted 20 years and was a \$40 million business with bones selling for approximately \$6 per ton. Shipped to St. Louis, Missouri, the bones were purchased for \$18 to \$27 per ton and used as fertilizer, in refining sugar, hoofs for glue, and horns to make buttons, combs, knife handles, and other items.

The young businessman recognized the unfairness of the system. "However, it is a satisfaction in some degree to recall

that none of that unjust profit came to the writer,” “Honest” John’s son recalled. It was not in his power to help, except to contribute in any way he could to make the Indians’ lives more cheerful, something he would continue to do the rest of his life.

Once the great plains of the United States was home to millions of American Bison or buffalo. The shaggy animals served as the livelihood of the Indians, often roaming in herds of 20 to 40 miles in width. As part of the effort to control the roving tribes, a slaughter of the buffalo was undertaken. Animals were shot simply for their hides, with the carcasses left to rot on the plains.

By the time McCreight arrived in the Dakotas, most of the Indian tribes had been confined to reservations and suffered under a corrupt system that left them penniless and starving. The gathering of buffalo bones to sell provided them some means of obtaining food. His honest dealings with the Indians helped cultivate a trusting friendship. In *Go West Young Man*, McCreight explained how he prevented an Indian uprising in 1885 because of his friendship with Chief Little Shell, leader of the Chippewa.

The Chippewa were assigned to the Turtle Mountain Reservation near Devils Lake in 1882. Approximately 22 townships were set apart for the tribe. Reports indicated that the tribe, made up of mostly mixed-blood and half-breeds, built homes and cultivated land, with the government furnishing food, livestock, farm implements, seeds, etc. to encourage them.

By 1884, presumably by the recommendation of the Indian Bureau, the reservation was cut to two townships. The Indians got the poorest of the land and the rest was open to white settlers. Quite suddenly, the Chippewa were unable to support themselves and were relying on a government that neglected its responsibilities. Chief Little Shell was among the leaders resisting the changes and trying to get the land restored

to them, something that was never achieved.

McCreight related the Indian uprising story, beginning when his roommate, now a man named Dr. Smith, awakened him at 4 a.m. to tell him that a band of Indians was having a war dance at the summer campground. McCreight had become known as the “Indian” man, someone the Native Americans trusted. Still he took his six-gun and went to see what he could do.

Going to the camp he found the Indians of the Turtle band holding an “undisciplined” war council. The Indians were upset over the white trappers, hunters, and wood cutters who encroached on their reservation. The authorities did not act upon their complaints and they were ready to take their own action.

Finding Little Shell standing at the edge of the crowd, McCreight led him away to the town where his roommate had found the owner of the fruit store and had him open it. Little Shell was exposed to new items – chewing gum, candy, bananas, and oranges – along with gifts of tobacco, cigars, peanuts, and matches. All of this was intended as a distraction, because the rest of the Indians would not attack while their chief was in the town. Help was three hours away at the fort and someone had already left for that destination.

McCreight also led the Indian on a window-shopping expedition to show him new items. To further lengthen the chief's time away from his people an itinerant tintype man was enlisted to take the chief's picture. They advised the chief that waiting for the sunrise would improve the process.

Only when McCreight got in the photo with Little Shell could the process proceed, for the chief feared the gun like lens of the box camera. One of the two prints of the shot was given to the chief, who was impressed. At that point he wanted to go back to his people; he repeated the Indian complaints to McCreight, who knew them to be true.



Chief Little Shell and Israel McCreight. This photo from 1885 may be from the day McCreight averted an Indian uprising.

Courtesy of Peoplepill.com

McCreight told the chief that the government would pay for the damages, but his people must not go to war because of these wrongs. Little Shell promised his people would not make war, returned to his stirred-up tribe and sent them back to their reservation. McCreight contacted the government with the Indian demands, but never received a response.

The Dakota winters were particularly memorable, as immortalized by Laura Ingles Wilder in *The Long Winter*, one of her “Little House” books. Winter brought McCreight adventures, including surviving two more brushes with death during an ice-quake that opened a 20-foot wide gap on the frozen lake after he had driven over it, and a blizzard on the open prairie.

The Dakota winter of 1885-86 was brutal. Storms and bitter cold claimed as many as 85 percent of the cattle in some areas of the territory. Writing about that winter in *Frontier Woman*, Walker Wyman reported, “According to a South Dakota folk saying, ‘It was so cold that when they died, they just sharpened his feet and drove them into the ground.’”

McCreight’s survival experience took place in March when temperatures had begun to rise. He set off with three friends in a cutter, pulled by horses covered with double thick blankets, to see a pair of oxen along Grand Harbor. They found the oxen and made a deal to buy them. On the way back to the sleigh, the day became as black as midnight and a Great Plains blizzard struck with all its fury. Despite being a short distance from the dugout of the oxen’s owner, it was impossible to reach it in the storm. The quartet wrapped up in the buffalo robes and blankets in the sleigh and prepared to die.

The driverless horses pulled the cutter through a howling storm that prevented the men from hearing each other when

they spoke. That “horse sense” proved to be their salvation. Following their own instincts, the horses pulled for nearly five hours through minus 32-degree temperatures arriving at a wayside stop called Brooks House where all found shelter. Over its two-week duration, 24 people and hundreds of head of livestock perished in the blizzard, but not McCreight, who had bigger things ahead back in Pennsylvania.

That return was not that far off. The arrival of spring brought news that the railroad was coming to the Dakotas. In 1883, Hill had extended his railroad east to Devils Lake. Hill’s Great Northern Railroad would reach the west coast 10 years later. Combined with his steam shipping interests on the Great Lakes, he had a transportation line that reached coast to coast.

McCreight and Bob Joynt shoveled the first dirt to lay the first tie for the last phase of the Great Northern Railroad. It would not to be the last time McCreight would take part in a groundbreaking. By the following fall, the west had moved to what is now Minot, North Dakota. A year later the railroad advanced to Great Falls, Montana. The west was effectively closing, and McCreight was there for part of its final act. Four years later it became official when the 1890 U.S. Census report declared the frontier to be closed.

Having asked for two weeks leave, McCreight returned home to visit in 1886. Waiting to greet him at the train station was Alice Humphrey. Alice heard the 10 p.m. train arriving, jumped out of bed, told her sister Israel was on the train, and went to meet it.

Part 2: Banker

Back from his adventures in the West, Israel McCreight, now 21, faced the problem of staying near home and Alice or returning to the plains. Alice won this tug of war, leaving him with a need to earn a living.

Despite his new rough and tumble western background, McCreight was still a banker by trade. The newly developing town of DuBois, going through growing pains similar to the new western communities, would offer an opportunity in that profession.

DuBois, northeast of Reynoldsville and established in 1872, was beginning to grow into the population and financial center of the area. This placed McCreight in a location with potential, much like Devils Lake had been to James J. Hill, from whose operations he learned so much in Dakota Territory.

The history of DuBois traces back to 1812 when George Shaffer became the first permanent inhabitant of what is DuBois, then an area in the wilderness. John DuBois Jr., who would become the community's namesake visited the area, but did not return to live there until 1872.

The DuBois family, like that of McCreight, has a long and honored history, tracing itself back to the 9th Century in Europe. At that time, it was already considered a relatively old family; in fact, the house of DuBois is the oldest nobility in the French Empire with a DuBois accompanying William the First in his quest to conquer England.

The name DuBois means "the woods" and it is an appropriate name, for later generations settled in New York and Pennsylvania frontiers and backwoods. The history of the DuBois family in the U. S. starts with Louie DuBois, a Huguenot born in northern France in 1626. Due to religious persecution, he brought his family, which included two sons, to the New World in 1660. They settled around the Hudson

River Valley in New York where DuBois and his wife had eight more children. Two generations later John DuBois also had 10 children, the second oldest was John Jr., born in Oswego, New York, in 1809.

John DuBois Jr. started in the lumber business at age 15, borrowing money from his family to buy 1,000 acres of land leading to the developing and building of a large logging business near Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Among his lumbering inventions was a log slide and the use of underwater bridge piers. He is also credited with starting mass production in his industry.



John DuBois
Namesake of DuBois
DuBois Area Historical Society
Collection

All of these ideas would be used when DuBois tired of his lumber, milling, and iron mill operations in Williamsport started looking for other land to buy. He came west to Clearfield County for the first time about 1842, when he was 33, meeting George Shaffer. DuBois saw the potential for the area, especially for timber and started to buy up large tracts of land, totaling close to 32,000 acres. Around 1870 he started to sell off his Williamsport holdings accumulating another large sum of money.

At the age of 63, DuBois started developing his property in Clearfield County. He had returned in 1871 to see George Shaffer, but discovered Shaffer had died and a man named John Rumbarger, who also played a large role in the founding of DuBois, was living in Shaffer's home.

Rumbarger, seeing that DuBois was going to be establishing business and bringing in a large potential for

different types of work, started to sell off the lots on the land he owned. The decision was fortuitous, because the population was soon to swell far above the 16 families who were residents in 1873.

The town began to grow rapidly. Rumbarger described it as beautifully situated on Sandy Creek within 80 rods of the railroad nearing completion and on a public road leading from Luthersburg to Brockwayville. He described the large steam sawmill and general lumber establishment, under construction by DuBois, which would give employment to not less than 100 hands.



John Rumbarger
DuBois Area Historical
Society Collection

Rivalry existed for many years between the coal miners and their families living in Rumbarger and the lumbermen and woodsmen residing on the DuBois side of the community. The village of Rumbarger near what is now Long and Main streets in DuBois was

soon outdistanced by rapid building on the DuBois side of town. DuBois soon became the name by which the community was known.

This development of DuBois' properties created a great influx of labor. He established a wood mill with a smaller mill in 1872, and the big mill, or the loggers' mill, in 1873. He added a box factory, manufacturing shirt cases, tobacco cases, siding, and flooring in 1881. He brought his Williamsport iron works to DuBois in 1875 and started a hemlock mill in 1884, which manufactured hemlock lumber and some hardwood lumber. Needing a market for the hemlock bark, DuBois and A. R. and E. D. Van Tassel started a firm for the tanning of

leather and built a large tannery also in 1884.

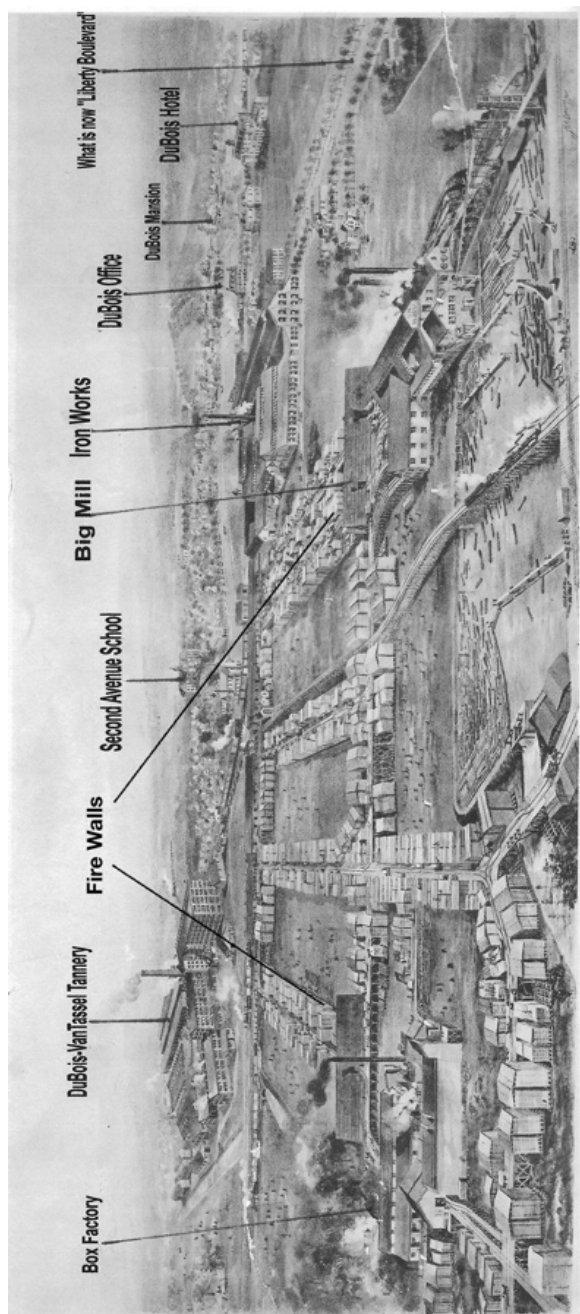
The lives of John DuBois and McCreight did not intersect. McCreight's 1886 return from his western adventures coincided with John DuBois' death.

Banking had developed along with DuBois' growth. Until 1880, it was an inconvenience for the residents because all transactions had to be made out of town. Horse and buggy were used to transport payroll money through the woods from other communities to pay the DuBois workers.

In *The History of Clearfield County* published in 1887, author P.S. Weber noted about DuBois, "The town labored long under the inconvenience of no banking facilities, being obliged to send to Brookville, Reynoldsville, Clearfield or Curwensville, or even other places for accommodation in that line until September 21, 1880, when the DuBois Deposit Bank opened its doors for general banking business."

DuBois Deposit Bank was a private bank with a paid in capital of \$5,000. W. C. Bovard, J. H. Chambers of Apollo in Armstrong County, S. M. Jackson of the A. V. Railroad, Dr. William McBryer and Dr. W. C. McCartney operated the bank. Bovard was the cashier and Miss L. J. Bovard the clerk. It was located in a 20 foot by 28-foot, two-story frame structure at 29 N. Brady Street. (then known as Courtney Street) built by Squire J. P. Taylor. That site is currently vacant and was most recently occupied by the Pennsylvania Academy of Cosmetology. After eight years the bank moved to the one-story brick Commercial Hotel building at the corner of Long Avenue and Courtney Street.

The concept of a private bank is foreign to current sensibilities. William C. Pentz explained it further in his book *The City of DuBois* published in 1931. He wrote, "It has not been many years since banking was rather a simple matter.



A view of the John DuBois holdings and the community.

DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

Any person who could gain the confidence of his neighbors could open a private bank. The word “bank” seemed to be attractive and not many people thought of investigating the responsibility of the institution, relying upon their knowledge of the individual who opened the bank. These bankers were not annoyed by government agents snooping into their affairs by examining their bank, and many depositors suffered heavy losses through their overconfidence.

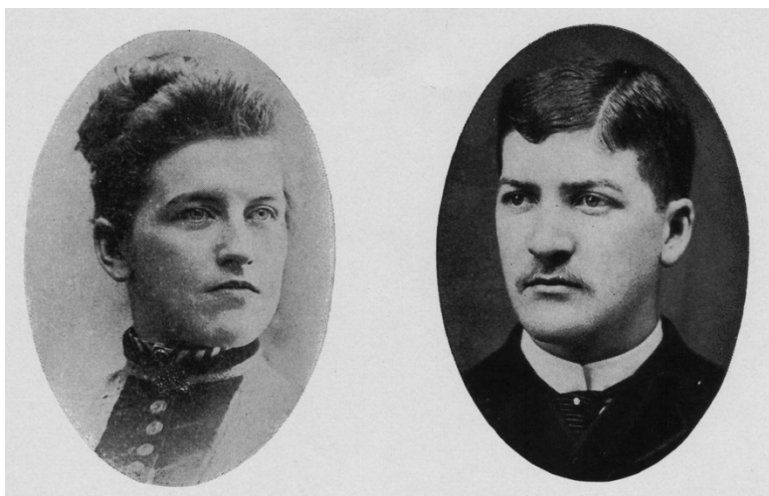
“A large number of the early banks of Clearfield County were private affairs. During and after the Civil War period the Federal government authorized the establishment of National banks. The National bank was compelled to buy government bonds in the amount of at least 25% of the capital stock and against which the bank was authorized to issue national bank currency to the amount of 90% of the bonds so held. Thus, a bank with \$100,000.00 capital could buy government bonds, which during and after the close of the Civil War were sold at an interest rate of 6% and 7% and the bank could issue \$90,000.00 in currency on which the Government would permit it to charge 6% interest on loans. Thus the bank was making as much as 13% on its capital without risk or effort. Interest rates were not carefully scrutinized and if the bank would get a higher rate of interest, it made that much more.”

F. K. Arnold opened the first bank west of Curwensville, Pennsylvania (approximately 20 miles southeast of DuBois), in his residence in Luthersburg in 1871. Stockholders were F. K. Arnold, Samuel Arnold and John Patton of Curwensville. They operated under the firm name of F. K. Arnold & Co. This firm lasted for three years before the company was dissolved. Arnold sold his residence in Luthersburg and moved to Reynoldsville, continuing to operate the bank. Following the growth of prosperity in the area he opened the First National Bank of DuBois City on August 1, 1883.

Arnold, who was nearing retirement, approached McCreight to buy part of his stock and take a position as

assistant cashier. McCreight accepted the position in 1887 and after conscientiously completing the correspondence to find a successor for his job in the Dakotas became the youngest bank director in DuBois.

No doubt Israel, in his youthfulness, felt like he had made it. Bigger things for him were only a few months away. But, first there was an important duty to be completed.



**Wedding photo of Alice Humphrey
and Israel McCreight**

From Go West Young Man by M. I. McCreight

Twenty-two-year old Israel McCreight and nineteen-year old Alice Humphrey, who the groom called, “the best girl in Jefferson County,” were married on July 29, 1887, at 7 a.m. in the home of the bride’s parents in Reynoldsville. Rev. H. J. Williams performed the ceremony.

In his autobiography, McCreight reports that William F. Cody, a.k.a. Buffalo Bill, “advised the wedding,” when he saw the girl. Cody and several members of his Wild West stopped

in DuBois after a successful run of the show in New York State.

According to an article by McCreight published in *The Best of True West Annual* of 1977, he met Cody in 1887-88 when Cody was traveling with his new Wild West show. He does not indicate where he might have met Cody, but would have had to been early in the year for Cody to offer McCreight advice about Alice. Records from Buffalo Bill Museum in Colorado show the Wild West Show visiting DuBois three times, 1895, 1901, and 1908. Cody no doubt met with McCreight on all of these occasions, with the last time resulting in McCreight being made an Indian chief.

"I wore the finest tailor-made suit I could buy," McCreight told a reporter from the *DuBois Courier-Express* newspaper about his wedding in an interview published on July 20, 1950. "It was silk lined, and of beautiful cloth. And it cost all of \$28. Yes-sir, I wore white gloves and a white beaver stove-pipe hat; I must have been a beau brummel if there ever was one."

As for his bride, she wore what he termed, "street attire," and added the following description, "The bride's hat was like the butt end of a flour sack, upside down – but her smile was worth it all."

Alice, no doubt, would have been upset by her husband's evaluation of her fashion decisions, but she proved to be far more practical in her choices. Immediately following the ceremony, the newlyweds took a two-horse carriage to DuBois arriving 10-minutes prior to the departure time for their honeymoon train. They spent the night at the Tift House in Buffalo, New York. The next day they visited Niagara Falls where they spent the night. By day three the newlyweds were in Jamestown, New York, where the groom noted they bought four pieces of furniture.

Returning to DuBois, they set up housekeeping in the former Mother Slack residence (Alice's grandmother), an already furnished home, at the corner of Long Ave. and State

Street in DuBois' First Ward. The groom with assistance from his father-in-law had purchase the home for just under \$1,000. Israel and Alice were now DuBois residents.

The house had two rooms upstairs and two down with a kitchen addition and a cellar. The kitchen was heated by a coal stove and held a table for the water bucket. A small barn stood at the rear end of the lot. There was a pump in the back yard, which would become important to the McCreights in a few short months.

Kerosene lamps lit the home. A coal stove provided heat in the first floor's front room, their place for hosting company. This room featured a flowered, wool carpet and a large framed carbon portrait that McCreight termed the 'he' member of the family perched on an easel with a "seep of red silk floating" from one side. Behind it was the back or dining room area with a cubby hold bed room adjoining.

They set up a den with table, chair and a library of reading materials including Shakespeare, the Scottish Chiefs and Whittier's Poems; and *The Morning Courier*, delivered to the front porch before breakfast.

Early on the visitors to the house consisted mainly of peddlers. "Principal society was made of book agents, peddlers with packs on their backs filled with needles, pins, laces, dress goods and table ware – if admitted to the home they were never in a hurry to leave," grumped the new owner.

The neighborhood included Frank and William Prothero living on the opposite side of the street; the Company Store on the corner diagonally opposite; and Charley McNulty's saloon in the next block west. Between McCreight's home and the saloon was the big Prothero lumber yard.

From this location Israel would walk to his job at the the First National Bank three doors from the corner of Brady Avenue (now Brady Street). He faced a rather long walk home from the bank for dinner every noon and was regularly delayed by trains at the railroad crossing at Franklin Street.

Indications are that the newlyweds lived quite economically, for McCreight reported they saved money at \$50 a month.

One of Israel's bank duties was to prepare big payrolls, which had to be ready by daylight for delivery. On that long walk from the bank to his home, he often carried that money with him, once with nearly disastrous results. On one occasion he observed a man watching him as he carried a little bag of old coins – big pennies and half-cent pieces – home to be examined and counted. Completing that task during the evening he placed the sack behind some books on the bedroom table when he and a now pregnant Alice retired for the evening.

Toward morning he was awakened by the same fellow he had seen earlier. This time the man was fumbling through M. I.'s trousers, which were hung over a bedside chair. Always one to be prepared, McCreight kept a revolver under his pillow. Withdrawing it he pointed it toward the would-be thief and put his finger on the trigger while Alice slept soundly alongside him.

Her condition caused the new husband to reconsider his action. McCreight explained it this way, "To kill a man so easily was surely justified; to have him fall over the bed and so wake the one who was soon to give birth to a babe, – well that was taking an awful chance – the finger on the trigger was relaxed. The steps of the intruder turned into the next room – the mill whistle blew for the coming day; the would-be robber hurried to the kitchen window but in passing the table hit the handle of the dipper which projected from the water bucket, made a racket, as he crawled out the window and escaped over the fence by the time the mill-whistle stopped blowing. The sleeping lady was gently wakened, a lamp lit, a search made –

nothing missing – but the little black dog, Carter, was under the bed shivering from fear.”

On May 20, 1888, the McCreight family expanded with the birth of four-pound Donald, the first of Israel and Alice’s seven children. For most men the birth of their first son would be the highlight of any year. That was probably true for Israel McCreight also, but in the space of the five weeks, two more momentous events happened in his life.

By this point, Arnold had retired as president of First National Bank and was succeeded by J. E. Long. The remaining active heads, with the thoughts of escaping government regulation and making more money, planned to liquidate the First National Bank and establish the private First Bank of DuBois. The majority of the stockholders did not approve of the plan.

DuBois historian W. C. Pentz wrote the story this way, “Mr. Bovard was growing old and wished to retire from the banking business and on the 4th day of February, 1888, he gave to W. C. Pentz an option to purchase his bank for the sum of \$11,000.00. \$10,000 was supposed to represent the capital of the bank and \$1000.00 was a bonus for the business. \$500.00 was paid down and the bank was to be delivered on the first of the following June. This contract is still in existence.”

The directors of the First National Bank of DuBois City were the people behind the purchase. They did not intend to merge the two banks, but to carry on the one as a private affair and the other as a national bank. They were basically owned by the same people, being few stockholders in the First National outside of the board of directors.

W. C. Bovard, the bank’s cashier was also reaching retirement age and McCreight approached him about selling the bank. Successful negotiations commenced and on June 4,

1888, R. H. Moore, McCreight and several others took possession of Deposit Bank continuing the business under the same name. Moore was the president and McCreight the bank cashier for the business located in the lobby of the one-story Commercial Hotel.

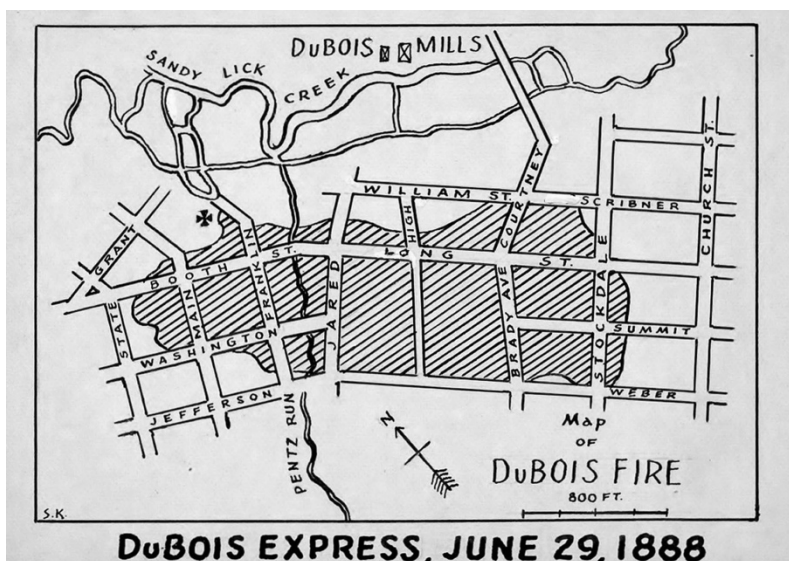
“The assets turned over to the new institutions consisted of the ‘good will’ and name of the Bovard bank, and on that day a deposit by Frank Hutton at the opening hours started the business of the present Deposit National Bank,” McCreight reported 50 years later in 1938. Several of the larger stockholders of the First National Bank were not invited to join the new Bank of DuBois and subsequently transferred their money to the new DuBois Deposit Bank.

McCreight would serve as cashier, then vice-president, and finally president of the bank until 1926, when he resigned as president to become chairman of the bank’s board of directors. His association with the bank would continue the rest of his life. By 1940, he had no official ties with the bank, but remained a stockholder.

Work hours were long during that initial time period, often governed by the daylight time available. McCreight reported that for many years on mill and woods pay days he would run the vault combination locks by lamplight and prepare and deliver the payrolls at the “break of day”.

Two weeks following the buying out of Deposit Bank catastrophe struck that would result in the rebirth of DuBois and propel the new bank cashier into a prominent role in the community.

June 18, 1888, was an oppressively hot and windy day. DuBois fire alarms were sounded at 2 p.m. Smoke came from the Baker House, a three-story building on North Franklin Street, located no more than 200 feet from the corner of Booth Street (now West Long Ave.). The fire fighters were limited



Shaded area shows the area burned in DuBois' Great Fire of 1888.

DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

by lack of water and a broken water line. The water at Baker House was turned off and the initial flame dousing was done with buckets of water from nearby buildings.

Many stories were related about the great fire. To modern readers two of them related to drinking and firefighting and the misuse of dynamite contain some grim humor.

At the time, the main part of town from Sugar Alley to Stockdale Street was almost all wooden buildings, that day all with hot, sun-heated roofs. The wind picked up and changed directions, spreading the fire in all directions. Flames leapt from building to building. Jumping the railroad tracks the conflagration proceeded quickly up Booth Street (now W. Long Avenue) and less rapidly south on Main Street.

McCreight's home adjoined the Prothero lumber yard, which was diagonally across the street from the big "company" store at the corner of Booth (now West Long Avenue) and State. McCreight dragged the furniture from his

home and with the aid of a passing farm wagon hauled the furniture to a vacant lot near the First Ward School.

Other nearby residents, believing McCreight's property would be safe transported their furniture to his location. Six to eight men, exhausted from fighting the fire were soon resting on mattresses placed in the yard. McCreight found them when he emerged from the house carrying a jug of blackberry wine. Taking the tin cup from his outdoor pump he passed out drinks to the men.

Revived the men returned to the fire-fight putting a ladder on the side of the nearby Gleason building, where the fire had already spread, in an effort to keep the flames from reaching the Prothero Lumber Yard and the rest of the Donegall Hill area.

McCreight joined them in the effort, climbing to the roof, walking to the square top storefront and pouring a bucket of water on the flames. The bucket brigade battled on in this fashion until the pump gave out almost simultaneously with the fire being extinguished, saving that portion of the town.

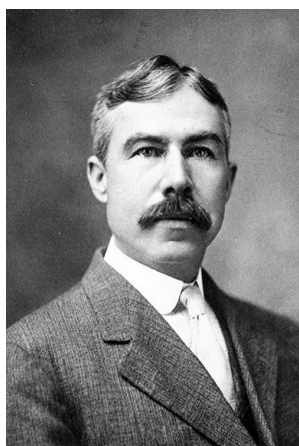
The Long Street area was not fairing as well. Brick buildings blocked the way, but they did not hold. The intense heat melted off iron shutters and ignited the building's interiors. When the fire reached Pentz Run, where the stream flowed across Long Street, two buildings were dynamited to clear a stop for the fire. Unfortunately, by the time the explosives were rigged and detonated, the buildings had already caught fire and the result was powering burning debris into the air, adding to the spreading inferno.

Fire neared the First National Bank building. Determining that the building could not be saved it was decided to remove the contents of the vault to the vault of the Deposit Bank. Baskets, boxes and bags of money and securities were carried to the fireproof vault. McCreight, who had arrived after determining his house was safe, stuffed them in. He needed a chair to stand on to jam the last of the legal papers from the

office of attorney W. C. Pentz inside before leaving the building.

Next he went to the Grier store, helping the owner to pack up his books and records taking them to the rear of Doc Sweeney's home where they were buried in the garden. He also helped remove dry goods from the Corbett store and assisted in the removing of post office boxes outside to an empty lot. The latter effort proved fruitless when the fire consumed it.

Jim Whitehall, bartender at the Central Hotel and the future first fire chief of DuBois, rolled six barrels of whiskey outside and hired several men to roll them up the hill to High Street. The barrels eventually wound up on the open ground of the Hines Opera house at the corner of Brady Avenue and Park Avenue drawing the attention of many exhausted men.



John E. DuBois
DuBois Area Historical
Society collection

Town patriarch John E. DuBois, nephew of John DuBois Jr. and inheritor of his uncle's property, arrived at this scene. Assessing the situation, he obtained a pole axe and promising to pay for the contents, knocked the heads off of the barrels spilling the whiskey into the street. His suspicions about the problems the whiskey could cause were justified when farther down the street, men were spotted lying on the ground, drinking the flowing whiskey from the gutter. DuBois sent word to Whitehill that he would pay in full for the lost contents.

John E. DuBois had also telegraphed to Renovo, Pennsylvania, for a fire engine, but it did not arrive in time to help. When the fire started, there were 166 businesses in the city. At 6 p.m. that evening, only six were left and nearly 500



The top photo was taken the morning after the fire showing the remains at the corners of Stockdale Street and Long Avenue. The Commercial Hotel is at right center in the photo. The bottom photo is taken in the direction of the Long Avenue and Brady Street corner from the area of what was in 1888 the Evangelical Church on East Long Avenue.



Above is a photo taken within days of the fire. Taken from a position in the vicinity of the present location of the 1888 Evangelical church on East Long Avenue in the general direction of the Long Avenue and Brady Street corner. At the left of the chimney the building at the left is the 1888 Reformed Church on High Street. To the right of this church can be seen the First Presbyterian Church and the original "Central" school building and the first DuBois High School. At the left of the Reformed Church on Long Avenue is a wooden building erected by Charles Scalen, prior to the ordinance forbidding the construction of wooden buildings, to be used as a tool house while he was constructing his new building (what became Lowe's Music Store, now part of the DuBois Area Historical Society's E. D. Reitz Museum). The brick building between this little building and the school is the barn behind the Lowe and Matthews property. To the right of the chimney, the white house is the home and office of Dr. Litz. Next is the "White" school (spire) and further to the right are the remains of the "Terpe" house at Scribner and Brady. Just to the left of the chimney there was a monument works and couple of pieces can be seen in the yard. In the distance to the right are the lumber yards and factories of John E. DuBois.

All three photos, DuBois Area Historical Society Collection

people were homeless. With the arrival of darkness, people attempted to guard their remaining goods but looting occurred.

The *Pennsylvania Grit* listed the following lost in the fire: 13 grocery stores, 9 hotels, 6 dry good stores, 3 hardwares, 8 drug stores, 2 banks, 2 newspapers, 5 gents' furnishing stores, 5 tailoring establishments, 7 restaurants, 3 boot and shoe stores, 5 millinery stores, 7 barber shops, 2 bakeries, 2 billiard rooms, 5 tobacconists, 3 furniture stores, 3 photograph galleries, 2 undertakers, 6 dress makers, 3 dental offices, 5 cigar manufactories, 2 carpet weavers, 2 jewelry stores, 3 liveries, 2 harness stores, 10 confectioneries, 6 meat markets, 3 law offices, 7 physicians' offices, 2 churches, 2 book and stationery stores, a tea store, a wall paper and window shade store, several sewing machine agents' ware rooms, a freight depot, carriage works, marble yard, blacksmith shops, shoemaker shops, etc.

The state sent military tents. Nearby towns sent food, cash and supplies. John E. DuBois called in all of the cooks from his woods crews and had breakfast ready for 1,500 people at the fairgrounds where several hundred families made their temporary home in the buildings and stables. DuBois also opened the DuBois Company Store for the victims, advancing them a line of credit. A committee from Philadelphia visited to see if assistance should be given for rebuilding, reporting back that DuBois was nothing more than a fairly recent lumber town.

DuBois had reached the crossroads of its existence. The residential sections of town remained, but the business district was gone. A new era in DuBois history was about to begin and McCreight and the banking business would be in the center of the revival.

First National Bank's vault on Long Avenue passed through the fire intact and for several months afterward was the only depository for money or valuables in DuBois. But

during the fire it was empty.

Knowing that the bank building would not survive the fire, officers of the First National had removed everything of value to the vault of the DuBois Deposit Bank. Deposit's vault was not as good as the vault at First National. In fact, its door was not even tight. But, believing the fire would not jump across Brady Street, the vault was filled to the top with everything of value from the two banks. McCreight added the last item, a large clothes basket full of papers from the law office of W. C. Pentz.

When the fire engulfed the building, fear filled the minds of all of the bank officials. Three days later a Pittsburgh safe expert arrived to open the vault. The door was badly damaged and his efforts failed. Workmen used chisels and hammers to break the door open.

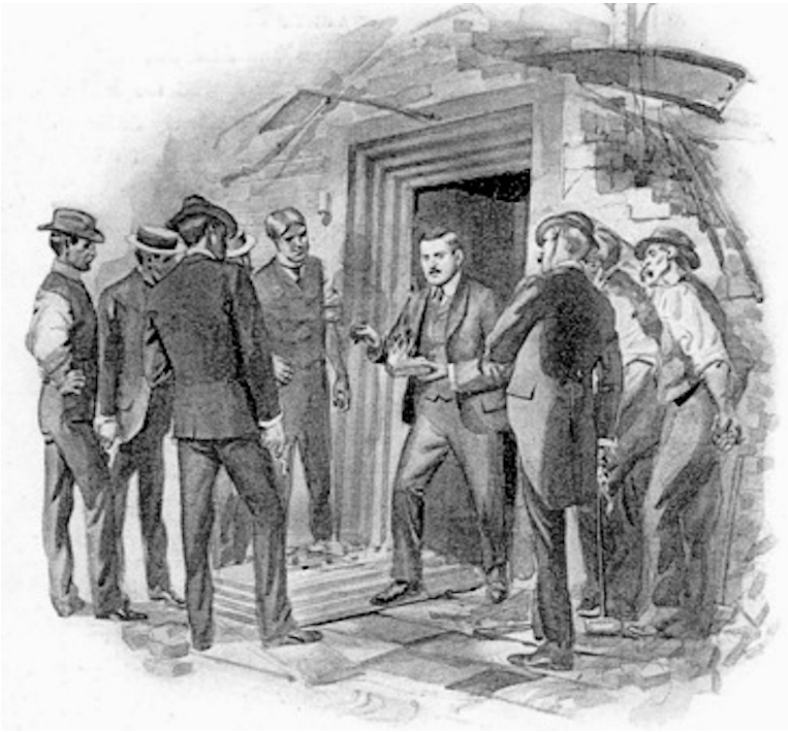
McCreight entered the still heated vault, finding the contents in good shape. Then to his no doubt horror, he noticed a box of almost full parlor matches on top of the last basket added to the vault. The matches were smoking and seemed ready to flame when he grabbed the box and passed it to the nearest man behind him, who relayed it on until the danger was averted.

The remainder of the vault's items were gathered and moved to the vault at First National Bank, where armed guards stood watch for many weeks.

Some of the contents of the vault were not as easily retrieved. Currency was intact, but badly roasted and faded. It was all redeemed at the U.S. Treasury. The gold and silver coin melted to the inner safe door and had to be removed with a chisel and hammer.

Writing in his autobiography, McCreight recalled, "I had just started the new Deposit Bank with office in the lobby of the Commercial Hotel. Just two weeks old. The big safe lay in the hot coals in the basement. Chains and crane lifted it to a temporary floor and three days later I sledged it open to find

the gold coin and the currency glued to the walls, but by chisels and a hammer the coin was recovered and later the big bundles of currency was redeemed by the government. The old frame opera house (writer's note: the Hines Opera House) had been saved and was the only building left – it was appropriated by both banks to reopen for trade.”



Major McCreight emerges from the vault with the matches following the Great Fire of 1888.

**From Deposit National Bank Silver Anniversary pamphlet.
DuBois Area Historical Society collection.**

Using a workbench for a counter in the eight foot by ten-foot check-room area of the opera house, McCreight conducted Deposit Bank business, while the First National Bank took up residence in the ticket office. Other businesses

joining the banks in the building included Hibner and Hollister Hardware and D. L. Corbett Dry Goods.

The vault of the National Bank was opened and served as a money safe for both banks – under Winchester rifle bearing guards. Each morning McCreight and the First National cashier met at the guarded vault. The cashiers each carried revolvers when they loaded the daily record books and cash in large clothes baskets. Armed guards escorted them front and rear until they reached their business sites. The banking business continued in this fashion for six months.

Insurance money soon arrived in DuBois and the town began to revive. Landowners found their property lines and began clearing and rebuilding.

Officials and residents also worked to ensure that the fire would not happen again. New building codes were enacted, requiring brick and stone construction rather than wood. A new water system was discussed, along with sewers. In 1889, the city contracted with the United States Water Company, later forming DuBois City Water Works Company. Water was supplied from what would become the Anderson Creek Reservoir located within six miles of what is now Treasure Lake.

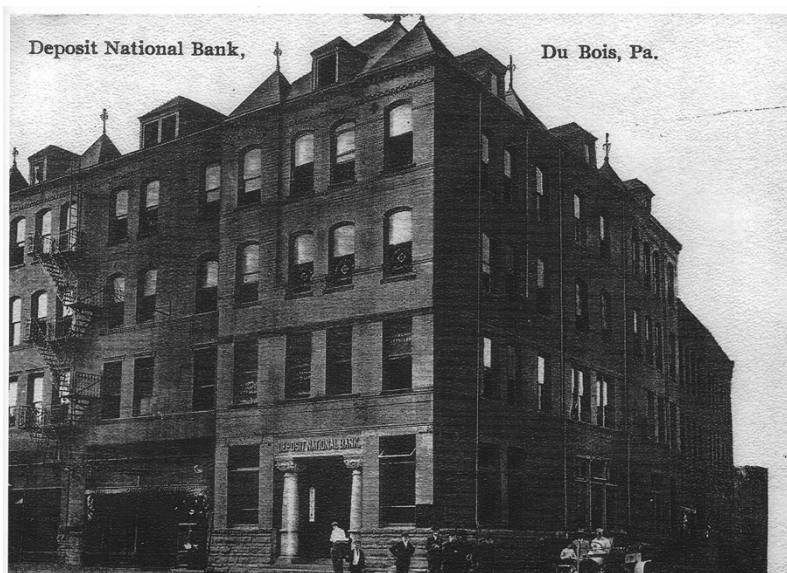
Within days following the fire, DuBois Volunteer Hose Company No. 1 was formed. Additional fire companies organized in other parts of the town. With fire companies established, buildings reconstructed with stone rather than wood, and an increased water supply, DuBois made sure another “great fire” would not happen.

Deposit Bank purchased some additional ground on its original site and erected a two-story brick building, continuing there until 1892 when its final location on the corner and Brady Street and Long Avenue was built. The corner property

was purchased for \$9,000. The new building designed by A. S. Wagner was approved and built on a larger scale than anyone but McCreight thought was necessary.

C. S. Booth was the construction contractor for the new building, which represented an investment of \$40,000 according to an article in the *DuBois Morning Courier* from April 24, 1893, the day the bank opened.

“To-day the doors of the new Deposit Bank Building on the corner of Long avenue and Brady Street, a cut of which is presented herewith (Writer’s note: the article included a woodcut of the building), will be opened for business,” reads the article. “The building stands upon one of the four corners which have always been and always will be denoted as the business center of DuBois, and upon ground which until now has been covered with temporary wooden rookeries. The value of the site has long been appreciated and it was the wish of those who took pride in the town that when a permanent building was put upon it would be something to which they



DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

could point as being a conspicuous exponent of the town's commercial property, and that is what is seen there to-day."

The article describes the lot as being 69 feet four inches fronting on Long Avenue and 167 feet on Brady Street with inside floor space of 21,600 feet. The banking portion of the first floor measured 26 ½ by 70-feet featuring a tile floor lobby, president's room to the right of the main entrance, banking room for tellers and book keepers, hall, vault, directors' room, and toilet and coat rooms.

C. R. Patterson of Pittston, Pennsylvania, made the woodwork for the counter and partitions from quartered white oak resting on a base of Tennessee marble. Above the wood was brass and glass. The panels were chipped glass, ornamental work produced, according to the article, by a method described in *Scientific American*.

The vault measured 7 by 14 ½-feet with a 13-foot ceiling. It held two steel safes, safety deposit boxes, and book racks.

D. L. Corbett & Company's dry good store occupied the rest of the first floor. The L-shaped room covered a 26 ½ by 110-foot front on Long Avenue and 28 by 50-foot front on Brady Street.

Twelve apartments/offices made up the second floor. Several were occupied when the bank opened including: Eclipse Lubricating Oil company, M. A. Tozier & Company insurance, and Dr. J. C. Wilson. The floor also had three vaults for the use of tenants and featured good light, steam heat, water and toilet rooms.

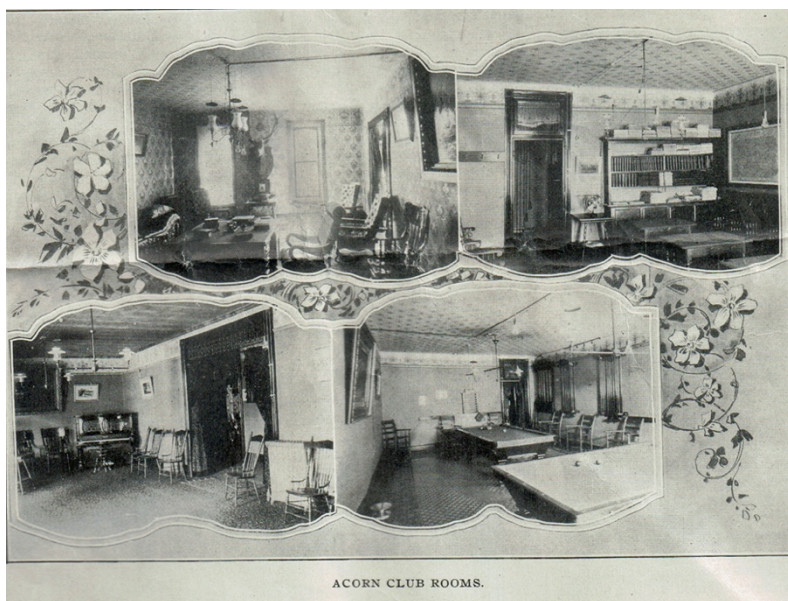
The third floor had space for the use of organizations. Two large halls, ante-rooms, a banquet hall, kitchen pantry, and toilet rooms filled this section. A smaller fourth floor did not have a specific purpose at the opening, while the basement area held Hibner, Hoover & Company's plumbing business.

The article concluded: "The imposing structure is so located and planned that under its roof there will be transacted business more diversified than in any other building in town.

It is fitted for electric light, gas, steam heat and water on every floor, is modern in every particular."

Using the lodge room was a unique new organization, the Acorn Club. Formed as an association of businessmen if became an "exclusive" social and political club. Parties and dances, most requiring formal attire, were held frequently. "But there was a constant conference about things needed in the town, and a conference about starting a dairy and cheese factory, shirt factory, an automobile factory, or a glass factory, resulted in one being started forthwith . . ." recalled McCreight.

The community ridiculed the construction of such a showy building. In the 1950 *Courier-Express* interview, McCreight noted, "They laughed at me for putting up such a pretentious building for the bank." He had a last laugh because the building was expanded three times making it one of the



DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

biggest banks and offices in the region.

The second floor became the McCreight family residence, ending their two-year occupation of the home on Long (Booth) Avenue and State Street, which they sold at a \$100 profit. Their new home became the first family residence in DuBois to be illuminated by new-fangled incandescent lamps.

With the occupation of the new bank building in 1893, the DuBois Deposit Bank was incorporated under state law with a capital of \$75,000. D. L. Corbett, whose store was also in the new bank building, became a stockholder and was elected vice president.

The same year the new bank building opened, McCreight probably felt he had returned to the wild west when he thwarted a day-light holdup attempt on the bank. At noon, a “burly fellow” entered the bank and gave the teller a note demanding \$10,000. A typist was also present, but could not



**McCreight is at left in this interior photo at
Deposit Bank.**

DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

see the teller, while McCreight, out of sight of the thief, was in his closed off, private office at the front window approximately 10 feet from the activity.

Hearing the exchange McCreight left his office. The click of the door closing behind him alerted the bandit to the arrival of a threat. He reached for his hip pocket where he had a gun, but never got it out before a raging McCreight was upon him, catching his arm and grabbing his throat. They fell in a tangled mass to the bank lobby floor where they rolled in an effort to get an advantage.

Their momentum carried them near the front door where the intruder forced his way to his feet. Facing each other in the doorway, McCreight landed a right to the would-be bank robber's jaw knocking him backward through the door and down three steps to the street. By the time he was on his feet again the furious banker arrived to land another blow knocking him into the ditch off the end of the wooden sidewalk. This time when the thief arose, he displayed common sense by running away.

"It was a case of not knowing what to do in an emergency; it also proved that one does not know just what he would do; this was luck," recalled McCreight.

A year later brought a depression known as the Panic of 1893. Lasting until 1897, it only slowed what was going on in DuBois, where its lumber, coal, and leather were still in demand. The Panic was precipitated when the Reading Railroad, a major eastern line went into receivership. Hundreds of banks and businesses dependent on the Reading and other railroads collapsed. Investors pulled their money from the stock market and combined with an ongoing agricultural depression in the West and South, saw thousands of businesses ruined and four million left unemployed.

Prosperity and failure marked the time in DuBois. In March 1893, the Bank of DuBois failed resulting in many financial problems for its depositors. Deposit Bank handled the depression, took in many of the failed bank's customers and served as DuBois only bank for five years. A more positive event was the opening of the new railroad between DuBois and Clearfield, on June 6, 1893, ending the daily stage route between the communities.

McCreight took advantage of the depressed economy. When lumber was \$6 per thousand feet, he bought enough to build a home on a burnt-out lot that he purchased on Long street. His family, had expanded to four following the August 6, 1892, birth of their first daughter, Catherine. Two years earlier, a son, John, was born, but lived only a short time.

The family occupied the newly built residence at 42 E. Long Avenue, just a few doors from the bank building, in Fall 1893. They lived in a small, rough shanty, later used as the stable, at the rear of the lot until the home, which is still in use today, was completed. He rented and later sold the residence above the bank on Courtney Street.

M. I. described it: "The new house was a large one – on a big lot – four rooms down, with four rooms and bath up stairs the 2nd floor – also had a large third floor, which became the general play-palace for all the children in the district; and it was a fine dancing floor. Altogether that home became the most popular in town. For grown ups as well as for boys and girls."

There was also a barn at the back where two riding horses were kept. Israel and Alice would often take the eight-mile ride to Green Glen Drive (currently Treasure Lake) and back before breakfast. M. I. declared, "She rode side-saddle, and was the best rider of the family."

Israel also briefly kept a milk cow obtained in trade for a sulky. He complained that he was the only one willing to milk it while Alice countered that cow smell and stable manure did

not fit her husband's status as a banker.

The McCreight's were hosts to many visitors. Israel recalled, "Out of towners came frequently, and when the Indians came, it was their tepee; it was the banker's duty to entertain the notables – lecturers, preachers, and agents – books or others. Some of these are remembered, -- Buffalo Bill, John Baker, Governor Bob Taylor, Governor Hanly, the La Folletts, Bob Burdette, John Wanamaker, Elbert Hubbard, Glenn Frank, Bob Strahorn, scout Captain Jack (Note: Crawford) the poet scout and many others. And always, the prominent Indian Chiefs, who came with the circus annually. And why not? – the lady of the house was a wonderful home-keeper and excellent cook. And a No. 1 entertainer in her own right. Her frequent card parties always brought a house-full."

Israel and Alice's family increased by one-third on Nov. 8, 1896, with the birth of twin sons, Jim and Jack. Born during President William McKinley's campaign there was a family disagreement over names, none could be agreed upon. Their grandmother, Eliza, declared she would name them, calling them Jim and Jack.

"They were exactly alike," recalled their father. "Their picture was in the Buffalo and other newspapers. Mother could not distinguish them and one time washed the one a second time." The twins became well known for the "smart" things they said and did.

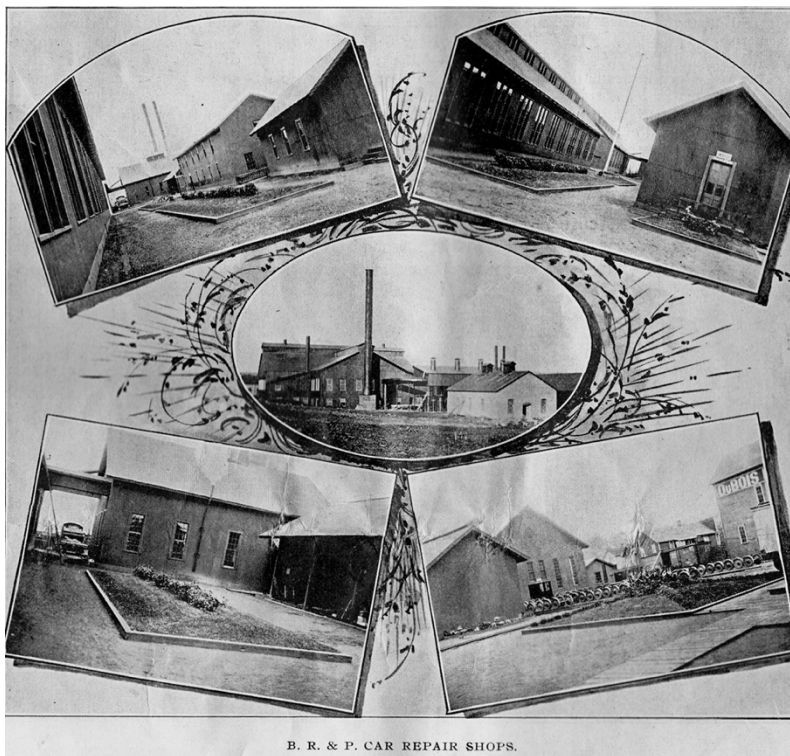
With all of the financial problems, crime became more common. McCreight reported, "There were a good many burglaries and bank robberies, and it being the time when night-burglars could blow safes with nitro-glycerine in an hour's time, these raids were becoming more and more frequent and often the writer went scouting to and around the outside of the bank, at 2 o'clock A. M., armed with his .32

Winchester.”

Another business success also marked 1896 for McCreight.

A committee representing the DuBois Board of Trade visited Rochester, New York, in an effort to influence the Buffalo, Rochester, and Pittsburgh (BR&P) railroad to locate car shops in DuBois. McCreight, secretary for the Board of Trade, was part of the committee along with M. D. Wayman, D. L. Corbett, and D. E. Hibner. They returned with a letter from BR&P President Arthur G. Yates stating the railroad’s needs and approximate costs.

Within six months, the BR&P car shops were a reality in



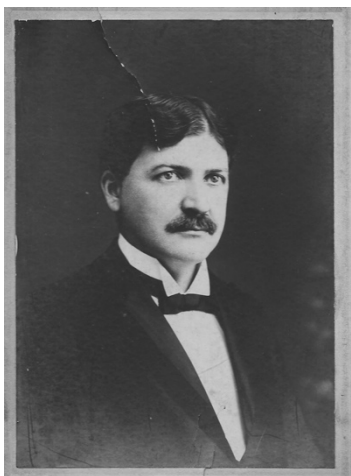
BR&P operations in DuBois.
DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

DuBois. The Board of Trade spent \$2,100 for the car shop site from \$13,247.50, which had been placed in Deposit Bank to support the establishment of the new business.

The car shops were just a part of the revived economy in DuBois. Working with Frank Hahne Sr., the Board of Trade, brought the DuBois Brewing Company to the city. The Mahler Glass Company also opened a hand-blown window glass factory and the DuBois Traction Street Railway Company established a trolley line from the East Side of DuBois to Rumbarger Cemetery on South Main Street.

The growth of DuBois brought McCreight into many different leadership positions. He reports that in 1898 he was cashier and director of Deposit National Bank; treasurer, secretary, and director of both the DuBois Brewing Company and the DuBois Traction Company; treasurer and director Mutual Building & Loan Association; treasurer of both Citizens Building & Loan Association and Mutual Home and Savings Association; Worshipful Master for Garfield Lodge; president of both the Acorn Club and the school board; representative agent for three coal properties; treasurer and director Board of Trade; local treasurer Keystone Building & Loan Association of Pittsburgh; and practical treasurer DuBois Borough.

McCreight was elected to the DuBois school board in 1893. With reelection in subsequent elections he served 25 years on the school board, 12 of those as board president. Being new to politics McCreight introduced a resolution to stop the practice of members deriving personal profit from furnishing supplies, building materials or trading votes to keep members of their families and relatives employed as teachers. The ensuing uproar brought accusations of a "secret session" school board, a proposal for a rival board, and a court case upholding the "secret session" board.



**McCreight from his
time on the DuBois
School Board.**

DuBois Area Historical
Society collection.

During McCreight's tenure, a high school was established and new buildings were erected in First and Fourth wards, and administrative affairs were modernized. But, as is the case in all public affairs, there were problems. For example: when the Second Ward High School (later know as Central Middle School) was built on Scribner Avenue, the lot was enlarged by the purchase of adjoining property and the construction costs exceeded the bid of the contractor. The community complained about the costs overrun and McCreight, as school board president, took

blame for building "a mammoth and expensive" structure.

The rebuilding of DuBois continued into the new 20th Century, a time when big business was rampant, buying up local industries and either moved them to large cities or closed them. McCreight's experiences gained from his time around James Hill's businesses now came into play starting with coal.

As far back as 1876 coal mining existed with the establishment of the Jones Brothers Coal Bank and the Sandy Lick Gas and Coal Company in or near DuBois. The following year, the Rochester Colliery near the current location of Christ the King Manor in DuBois opened.

Until 1892 the coal business in the DuBois region was a monopoly through the Bell, Lewis and Iselin interests with the

Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh railroad in complete control of production and transportation of coal and coke. This included the Big Soldier and Helvetia works in the Reynoldsville field and the Eleanora, Walston, Anita, and Wishaw works in the Punxsutawney field.

However, at Rochester Mills and Luthersburg, untapped coalfields existed and Berwind-White Coal Mining Co. of New York found the fields to be of superior quality. The company founded in 1886 still exists today under the name Berwind and is still a family owned company located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, specializing in investment management, not coal.

The Berwind-White interest brought considerable money into the hands of the farmers in those areas. In the days before big business and stock market investing, these people invested in real estate through the banks.

Coal was king during this time period and McCreight had knowledge of the coal beds. When coal and railroad businessmen came to the area seeking data, they found someone who could answer their questions with some authority. Always a champion of the underdog, McCreight took part to see some fair play come to his old neighbors in the Reynoldsville area and others who he believed were being wrongly exploited.

Deposit Bank and the new Bank of DuBois had an unwritten agreement not to solicit the business of the other, believing there was enough work for each. That changed when the Bank of DuBois secured the aid of L. W. Robinson of the Bell, Lewis & Yates coal interests to support its candidate for treasurer with the condition that the public funds not be removed.

That treasurer told McCreight about a secret pre-election agreement that the coal company's support was gained only on the condition that all public banking would be with the Bank of DuBois. McCreight, who above all prided himself on

honesty in all dealings, was insulted by this agreement by people whom he considered to be friends and associates. He determined to meddle in the coal business since coal was already meddling with the banking business. Knowing there was coal land south of Big Soldier mine and between that mine and Helvetia, and knowing the people of his home area, he set out to do something about it.

“A few days to think it over, and the young inexperienced politician who had just had his first lesson in that racketeering profession, saddled his riding horse and rode into his old-home district with a bundle of coal leases in his wallet; the key farms were secured in an afternoon’s work, but absence from his duty at the bank required help to obtain adjoining lands at the east and west, and J.H. Pentz lent his experience and aid, and soon the large field was under option,” he recalled.

Pennsylvania Senator S. R. Peale of Lock Haven was promoting the Beech Creek branch of the New York Central railroad in the Clearfield region. The railroad system was seeking its own fuel supply and wanted to get into the Soldier Run field for high quality coal. Peale and other New York Central officers organized a syndicate to prospect these new land options. More political shenanigans ensued with the opposition attempting to induce the farmers to refuse extensions of the land option while core drilling took place. But, McCreight’s farmers held solid.

Simon Bolivar Elliott, a lifelong McCreight friend, and general manager of the Rochester and Pittsburgh Coal and Iron Company made an offer to buy all of the land. The rejection was probably a first for the prosperous company.

Combined with the Berwind purchase of the DuBois coalfield, the Big Soldier-Helvetia purchase probably saved the questionable future of DuBois. The lumbering days were rapidly ending. The last tree on the vast DuBois lumbering property was felled on February 22, 1901, ending the era of lumber as a major industrial player. New industry was needed

to provide a spark. Coal proved to be the answer bringing money generally into the area and specifically into Deposit Bank. Thus, ended round one of the coal disputes.

Round two of the coal/banking disputes came in 1898. During a meeting with Arthur Yates from the BR&P, McCreight suggested the railroad should buy the Hand-Heberling lands for the coal. Yates urged L. W. Robinson to pursue the purchase and according to the information returning to Israel, the response was "Tell McCreight to mind his own business." He also later heard from another coal miner that it had been said, "McCreight got his coal but he hasn't a chance to get it out, we have the railroad."

Coming to the conclusion that another railroad or at least another coal company was needed to battle what was becoming a monopoly, McCreight in July 1898, saddled his horse and headed for nearby West Liberty. He again bought key farms and made inquiries about some larger landholdings. The Erie Railroad came to McCreight's aid, joining in the purchase of some of the land and leasing others, effectively acquiring 1,800 acres of coal potential. McCreight also had options from John McLeavy and J. H. Pentz on another large field in the Cramer section and the Erie Railroad also acquired this additional 3,000 acres giving it most of the non-mined coal land between DuBois and Big Run.

Erie Railroad was now in a position to reach the property and haul coal out on its own trains. The railroad opened the Eriton coal mine bringing more jobs and payroll to the DuBois area.

All of this dealt a serious blow to BR&P interests and upset Robinson, who sent word that he would get even. A year



DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

later he opened Union Banking and Trust Company in DuBois, the first competitor for Deposit Bank in many years. However, rather than hurting Deposit Bank the opening of a second bank benefited the community, which continued to grow and prosper.

The economic boosts were most fortuitous because the turn to the 20th Century brought an end to DuBois' first industry, lumbering. The future now lay in coal and the railroads. The opening of a locomotive shop joining the already established car shops were an indicator of that fact.

Banking was also growing and McCreight joined in the forming of the Pennsylvania Bankers' Association. The organization was a part of the larger American Bankers Association, which helped to get William McKinley elected president in 1896 and 1900. McCreight, who campaigned for McKinley, got to meet the chief executive when members of the Mystic Shrine were invited to a White House reception.

In the lull of the coalfield acquisition war, M. I. and Alice welcomed a second daughter into their family. Daughter Martha was born on Nov. 3, 1900.

The third round of the coal battles that firmly moved DuBois from a lumber-based to a coal-based economy, played out in 1904. It opened with McCreight invited to meet with Frank Henry Goodyear of Buffalo, New York, about the expansion of his company into the coal business.

Goodyear (1849-1907) was the son of a country doctor and passed his boyhood in Holland and other small towns in the vicinity of East Aurora, New York. He came to Buffalo at the age of 23. In 1887, Goodyear and his brother, Charles Waterhouse Goodyear, formed a lumber company and related organizations that became quite prominent under the firm name F. H. & C. W. Goodyear. They were pioneers in the construction of standard built and equipped railroads for logging operations, penetrating the timber tracts of Pennsylvania, which had, up until that time, been considered inaccessible to railroads.

From this beginning grew the Buffalo and Susquehanna Railroad. After opening up remote lumber areas, including Potter County to the north of DuBois, the line became a permanent freight and passenger line. Frank Goodyear was president of the Buffalo & Susquehanna Railroad, the steam ship company and iron company of the same name, and the New Orleans Great Northern Railroad. He was a partner in the Goodyear Lumber Company, and a director of the U.S. Leather Company and the Marine National Bank.

Following the meeting McCreight prepared a map of the undeveloped coal deposits in the DuBois region including the E. J. Berwind holdings, the DuBois properties, West Liberty, Big Soldier-Helvetia, Cramer, part of Troutville, and land below Big Run. The map's arrival brought Goodyear to

DuBois to meet with McCreight. Goodyear in a handshake agreement asked McCreight to acquire the properties.

The Berwind property came first at a cost of \$400,000 and using his own personal form of persuasion McCreight purchased all the coal property stretching southward to Indiana over a three-year period. The Buffalo & Susquehanna railroad expanded into this coal region prompting another boom in jobs and for the economy of the DuBois area, including the opening of Shaft Number 1 coal mine operations at what is now the DuBois Mall.

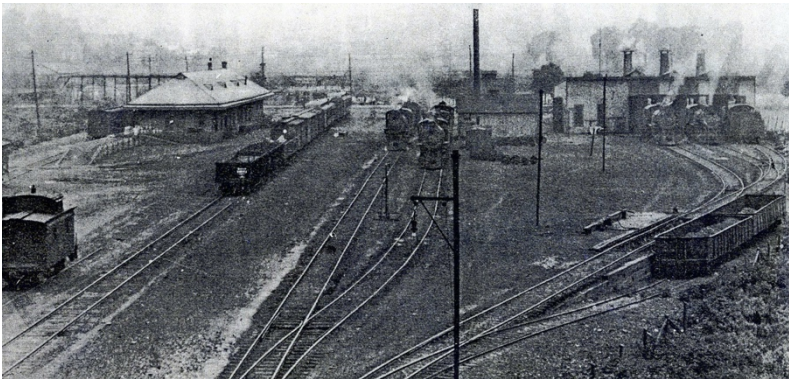
McCreight encountered two problems during this process. The first came during an attempt to hurry along the construction of a railroad bridge over Maple Avenue. Borough council had to approve an ordinance to permit the project and two members were not available to complete the quorum of a special meeting because they would have to leave work and be docked a day's pay, approximately four to five dollars. McCreight arranged for their pay to be made up by Goodyear, prompting bribery accusations to spread throughout the community. No charges were ever filed, the vote was made, and the bridge project was approved.

The second arose during an opposition to the right-of-way for the Highland Street tunnel and the B & S crossing. McCreight bought an estate, covered with virgin timber and owned by thirteen heirs, to prevent court proceedings. McCreight wrote, "Instead of greeting a new railroad and the development of new and large industries with a spirit of welcome and appreciation, it seemed that every hand was out to grab for what it might strip from the promoters."

Between 1901 and 1931, more than 20,000 acres of coal land between Tyler and Sagamore, Pennsylvania, were purchased and mining operations started, much of it through McCreight's efforts. Of course, once the coal was removed from the ground, it had to be transported bringing McCreight's knowledge of the railroad business into play.

The Buffalo & Susquehanna prospered with DuBois as a major industrial center on its lines. In addition to the three railroad tunnels near the city, the railroad had a combined passenger and freight station, engine house, coaling trestle and repair facilities near the present-day Social Security office and Martin's Plaza in DuBois. This location was in a flood plain and a July 18, 1942, flood caused much damage to the B & S lines in DuBois and washed out an entire track near Galetton. This act of nature was the first step in the demise of the B & S. All that remains of what was once an enormous railroad industrial empire is the railroad crossing at Lezzer Lumber and an operating track leading into Domtar, both near Shaffer Road in DuBois.

As in all of the previous coal acquisition efforts, Deposit Bank prospered along with the community. The economy grew to an extent that John E. DuBois established a third bank, DuBois National Bank to compete with Deposit and Union Bank. Deposit faired well-enough that it was enlarged.



**The Buffalo & Susquehanna terminal in DuBois.
A flood on July 18, 1942 led to the demise of
the railroad in DuBois.**

DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

Part 3: Indian Chief

The purchase of the property from the 13 heirs during the final stage of the coal battles proved monumental for M. I. and his family. Shortly thereafter, he built his new home, dubbed the Wigwam among the trees that were preserved when he purchased the property.

The Wigwam was an unusual design for a Pennsylvania home, multi-sided surrounded by a covered porch. M. I., in his usual fashion, credited Alice, stating, “The house on the farm was chosen by her majesty from plans seen in a Florida magazine; it was to be only a country place for vacations.”

But it was also a working farm, perhaps drawing M. I. back to his boyhood beginnings, and later became the permanent home for M. I. and Alice. Their last two children were added to the family after the construction of the Wigwam – Major Israel Jr., born on June 18, 1906 and Rembrandt Peale born on Feb. 25, 1909.



The Wigwam

DuBois Area Historical Society Collection



The view from the Wigwam looking east.

DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

More than 60 years following the Wigwam's construction McCreight reminisced, "It was so big that some folks called it a mansion; the barn was built first – and the family lived in it for a season. Sometime later the old barn at the No. 42 home on Long Avenue was torn down and moved to the farm; was re-constructed for a farmer's house; the old log-road into the forest was repaired and suited for the buggy to get back and (be) of use in hauling furniture and supplies fall and spring – for then the children had to be in town for school fall and winter. And always a farmer had to be kept over winter to feed the live stock, do the milking, and deliver the produce to the town house. There was at least one team and two or three ponies – one year a dozen cows and as many hogs and chickens – orchard trees planted – ornamental and shade trees placed, well drilled; please be sure it was a real country place."



**A period postcard showing the road leading
through McCreight's woods.**

DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

The barn, where the family lived for a season, met with disaster, although it was recalled in different years by two witnesses. “Then about 1906 the new barn burned to the foundation; it was an exciting time that night, but the horses and other live animals were saved,” wrote McCreight, who also noted that the Wigwam, thanks to a four-footed friend, nearly had a comparable catastrophe.

“Similar fate was saved for the house by ‘Pete’ the colly (sic) farm dog. Catherine had been ironing washings on the back veranda – she left the electric iron stand as connected to the ironing board. During the night, Pete came to the stairway and barked loud and long to those asleep in the upper floor – woke the man of the house who ran down to learn what was alarming Pete; the burn was just about to break out into dangerous flames; it was ripped away and thrown into the yard. And Pete was satisfied.”

Dorothy Waldsmith, McCreight’s niece, recalled the barn fire in a different year, probably 1902. Her remembrance

would place the barn fire on August 6 or 7, 1902, corresponding to the date of her cousin Catherine's birthday and at a time when the McCreight's oldest son, Don, was not at home. Waldsmith wrote:

"The summer Catherine was ten, Aunt Alice had a beautiful party for her. That night, I awakened and saw a glow. Thinking it was a light on the sleeping porch, I went out, and saw that the big white barn was burning. That night both my aunt and uncle proved their mettle. The gardener and Don were away. Aunt Alice was afraid of their fine horses, and until then, Uncle Maj hadn't driven their car. Aunt Alice, in her bare feet and night gown, put gunny sacks over the heads of the spirited horses and led them out to safety. Meanwhile, Uncle Maj drove out the car, and rescued the twins' pony, Pedro! The twins were only six years old, and were on their knees praying. Their youngest sister, Martha, was not so lucky. Her little Bantam rooster did not survive the fire."

The Wigwam became a landmark because of its water tower and windmill. It also became a gathering place that the community knew well.

"One great farm exploitation was the building a giant water tower and windmill," McCreight recalled. "It was of channel frame steel and it stood fifty feet high when the big windwheel was put to work. It was a popular landmark for miles; and it was a real success for the wind did keep it screeching. The only thing wrong with it was the lack of water in the well; it took the mill five minutes to pump the well dry – never could raise a depth of an inch in the huge tank at the top. For many years the tower served the boys as a lookout – finally sold for junk and torn down."

Many were invited guests to this DuBois landmark. "During the summer and fall big parties were always popular at the farm – once there were 191 people at such a party and there was no crowding," M. I. remembered proudly. "The DAR, the SAR, the Women's Clubs of out of town places, the

bankers, service clubs, from own and other towns made it a gathering place.”

Those gathering included the famous of the time period. Among the visitors to the Wigwam were Captain Jack Crawford, the poet scout; Col. Robert E. Strahorn, a pioneer war-correspondent and railroad builder; Buffalo Bill; and Indians Iron Tail, Flying Hawk, American Horse, Blue Horse, John Grass, Black Thunder, Whirlwind Horse, Turkey Legs, Lone Bear, Iron Cloud, Bear Dog, Yellow Boy, Rain-In-The-Face, Hollow Horn Bear, Kills-Close-To-Lodge, Red Eagle, Good Face, Benjamin Brave and Thunder Bull from among the Oglala, and legendary Crow Chief Plenty Coups.

Summing up the value of the property when he was 86-years-old, McCreight said, “The farm was a wonderful home for all the children as they grew up from babyhood – a joyful, happy, and healthful life. And it is so yet after half a century, for the parents, who now occupy the place all alone.”

Perhaps McCreight’s proudest moment came on June 22, 1908. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West made a stop in DuBois. McCreight in his new 1907 Rambler automobile, driven by his oldest son, Don, picked up Cody and Chief Iron Tail, and drove them around the community.

Their final destination was McCreight’s 42 East Long Avenue home for dinner (in this instance a noon-time meal).



**William F. Cody
(Buffalo Bill)**

Courtesy Library of Congress

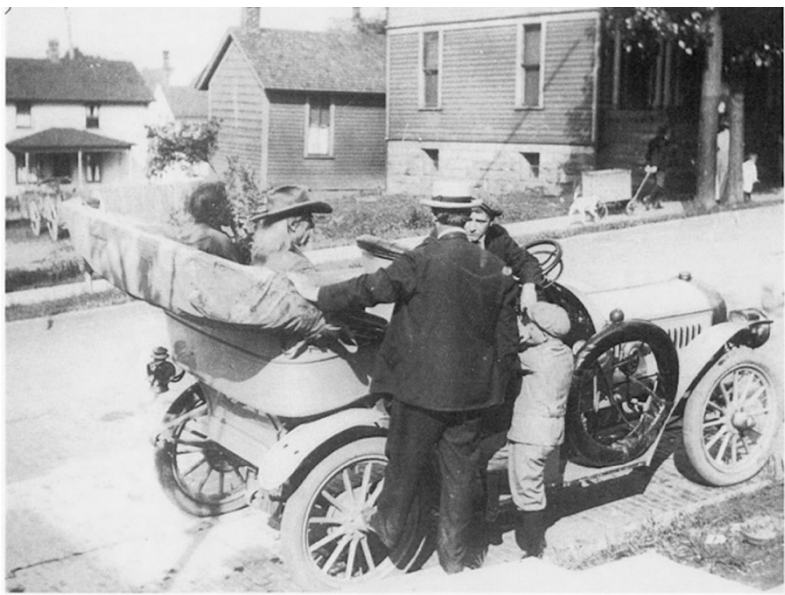


**Chief Flying Hawk (left) and Iron Tail with
M. I. McCreight and son, Major Israel Jr. in
1911.**

DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

Completing the western grouping was Monroe McCanles, a houseguest of the McCreights. McCanles' father was shot and killed by Wild Bill Hickock during a famous gun battle of the west. Cody had a great interest in the incident and questioned Monroe extensively about the incident during the visit.

A photographer captured this rare gathering of western legends in the east. The photo became famous enough that



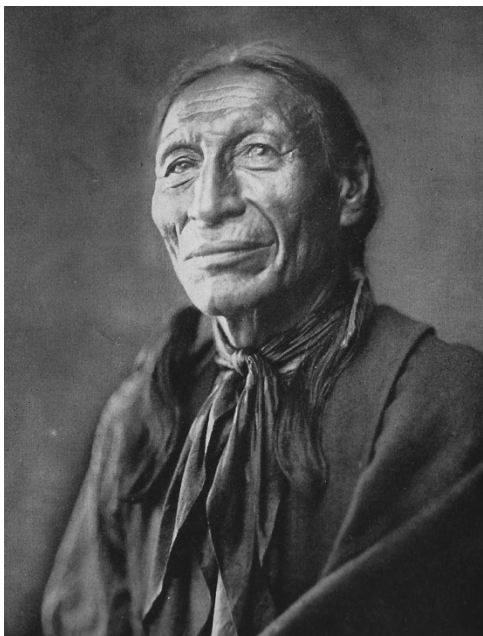
William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill) and Chief Iron Tail sit in the back seat of M. I. McCreight's car outside McCreight's home at 42 E. Long Ave., DuBois, on June 22, 1908. Don McCreight is the driver of the car, while one his twin brothers (either Jim or Jack) is standing at the curb. The man standing is Monroe McCanles, son of David McCanles, a legendary outlaw killed by Wild Bill Hickock. This photo was published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1908.

Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Saturday Evening Post magazine paid \$50 for a copy for publication. An even better photo would have been available later that day when a full car-load of Indians made a tour of the town, dressed in their native regalia of feather-head-dress and war-paint and singing war songs with great glee.

After dinner and prior to the afternoon Wild West performance, Cody took M.I. and Alice to his private tent in the Fairgrounds. Four of the big chiefs of the Indians and 150 tribal members gathered at Cody's tent. The chiefs honored McCreight by making him a chief of the tribe. Alice, Cody, and Bill Hines were the only whites permitted at the ceremony.

"The ceremony was conducted by Chief Iron Tail – began with a speech in Sioux dialect – a warbonnet placed on his head, and moccasins put on his feet," wrote McCreight, now known as Chief Tchantka Tanka (Big Heart), in his autobiography. "A tepee was then presented for himself and squaw to live in. Tom-toms were beaten and tribal songs put up vigorously, all ending with hearty hand-shakes. Then the ceremony was re-opened and another talk by the chief followed. It was a rare and even brilliant occasion



**Chief Iron Tail, the face on
the buffalo nickel.**

DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

– and the Colonel and the big chief were loaded in the auto and driven (back) to the East Long Ave. home for the banquet

which followed. There the Chief was presented with a new Winchester rifle as souvenir of the event.”

Iron Tail (1842-1916) was an Oglala Lakota Chief and a star performer with Buffalo Bill's Wild West. He was one of the most famous Native American celebrities of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and a popular subject for professional photographers who circulated his image across the continents. Iron Tail is notable in American history for his distinctive profile on the Buffalo nickel or Indian head nickel minted from 1913 to 1938.

Economic growth was slowed again by the Panic of 1907 sometimes referred to as the Roosevelt Panic of 1907, because critics blamed President Roosevelt for his policies of regulating big business. Stock prices had fallen throughout the summer with some experts estimating the losses at \$1 billion. On October 17, bankers F. Augustus Heinze and Charles W. Morse drove up copper prices in an attempt to corner the market. They failed miserably and when word leaked that Knickerbocker Trust Company, the second largest investment bank in New York had backed their effort, investors pulled their funds from the bank causing it to fail.

With no centralized banking system, financier J. P. Morgan, then 70 years old, stepped into the void. He and his partners met with leading bankers, shifting money from one bank to another to keep the most important from failing, spending in the process nearly \$10 million over two days. In an unprecedented move, the U. S. government promised \$25 million to the bankers' fund to be distributed at Morgan's discretion. That money was pumped into the New York Stock Exchange in time to keep all of the banks across New York City from collapsing in what would have set off an economic catastrophe.

DuBois was affected far less than other parts of the country and Deposit National Bank survived, but not without problems. In 1912, McCreight reported to the bank's stockholders that while modest profits had been obtained and business volume increased, the same rate of growth could not be promised in the future.

The national answer to the economic issues came through a reform of the bank system completed on December 23, 1913, with the passage of the Owen-Glass Federal Reserve Act. It provided bank note currency, which is more responsive to business requirements; created 12 regional Federal Reserve Banks, with all national banks forced to join the system by depositing from one-half to two-thirds of their legal reserves in a common account; and created a Federal Reserve Board. The Reserve Banks serve as pools open to member banks anywhere in the land. The Federal Reserve Banks dealt only with the U.S. Treasury or with member banks.

Banks throughout the country, including McCreight's protested the passage of the Federal Reserve Act. Three hundred bank officials were selected as a committee to protest to President Woodrow Wilson about the law. McCreight, who was serving as the president of the Central Pennsylvania Bankers' Association, went to Chicago, Illinois, for the national meeting. At the meeting seven bankers were selected to meet with Wilson and voice their objections. The effort, however, failed when President Wilson refused to meet with the bankers. Instead the federal government established 12 central banks.

"Thus began the centralization of control of all the country's money and credits into the hands of the few!" lamented McCreight. No doubt, his bank's earnings were affected by the federal decisions.

The Federal Reserve System received its first real test when the United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917, by providing the credit for big business to build the weapons of war. The war ended in 1918, followed in the 1920s by a retrenchment policy refusing loans and calling in those that were outstanding. This policy hit bankers and farmers the hardest.

McCreight took a trip across the continent, visiting country and city bankers, farmers, ranchers, and grain producers. He was appalled by what he learned recalling:

“During that terrible panic the young banker went west to learn at first hand what was happening – over the northern route west to Seattle, thence south to San Francisco and back over the Union Pacific; thence to Kansas City. At all stops he called on the banks and business men to see what was doing. Ranchmen all across the country were sheriffed, sold out, and left to wander. It was terrible to see. Letters were written to the larger banks of New York telling them what was going on inland. Most of them replied in tones of appreciation of the conditions, but none had a remedy – blamed the government, and the banks who lent too much on land or livestock; the wreckage of this foolish move of the Federal Reserve Board, was as severe or more so, than any panic we had suffered to that time. It took several years to get back any sort of recovery in business and farming – then in ’28-9 a real panic broke and before it was over, all banks were closed by government order – with only safe ones to reopen. Our own was one to reopen at once. Soon it was designated to take over one nearby bank classed as insolvent; this was done successfully.”

Following up this trip with a visit to New York City, McCreight met with the heads of several of the large banks. “The heads of the giant New York banks, with one exception, admitted the seriousness of the movement, but were unwilling to do anything about it,” he moaned.

McCreight often expressed his dissatisfaction with what would later become known as the “military/industrial

complex,” feeling that much damage was being afflicted on the economic and financial affairs of the country.



**A reception for Chief Iron Tail
at the Wigwam in 1915.**
DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

Part 4: Conservationist

If M. I. McCreight ever called anyone a nemesis, forester/conservationist and fellow Pennsylvanian Gifford Pinchot would have filled that void.

Pinchot had an advantage over McCreight in that he had the ear of President Theodore Roosevelt, a man McCreight greatly admired and emulated, down to using one of Roosevelt's favorite phrases, "bully".



Gifford Pinchot
Courtesy Library of
Congress

Roosevelt and Pinchot, with the exception of all three having western experiences, had quite different backgrounds from McCreight. Roosevelt and Pinchot were born into wealth, growing up cultured and in comfort, but disdained the rich. Both were educated at premier colleges, Roosevelt at Harvard and Pinchot at Yale, where the gangly six feet two inches tall, 175-pound Pinchot was a backup quarterback on the football team coached by Walter Camp. Both were bored by academic life, passionate about nature, and hyper-competitive. They were reformists with self-righteous streaks, both drank little, and both regularly attended church. They found the West restorative, and thought they could change the world.

Pinchot's father, James, who built the family home Gray Towers, now a national historical site near Milford, Pennsylvania, suggested forestry as a career to his son. At that time, it was an unheard of field in the United States. Gifford went to France to study this new discipline. Upon his return he visited the western U. S. and when he returned East

accepted a position as consulting forester, probably the first job of this type in the United States. The Pinchot family would later endow a forestry school at Yale.

Among Pinchot's friends was John Muir, the famous conservationist and founder of the Sierra Club. They formed an unofficial caucus with Frederick Law Olmstead, the eminent park designer most prominently of Central Park in New York City, Bernard Fernow, a German-American forester, and botanist Charles Sargent. Pinchot became a leading voice in the quest for a National Forest Commission and eventually was appointed by President Grover Cleveland to decide what to do with western lands.

His efforts led to President William McKinley naming Pinchot forester. When McKinley was assassinated, his successor Theodore Roosevelt kept Pinchot in the same position. Pinchot also helped to write Roosevelt's speeches and assisted in his dealings with the U.S. Senate.

Their partnership was so close that Roosevelt in his autobiography wrote about Pinchot, "Among the many, many public officials who under my administration rendered literally invaluable service to the people of the U.S., he on the whole stood first."

Roosevelt in his inaugural address called for preserving forests and fresh water, a goal which would be one of the defining features of his presidency.

One writer reported that Pinchot knew himself to be "strange – a bit odd." He was described by one observer as a loose cannon fanatic without an authoritative figure above him.

Two major issues – who founded the nation's conservation policy and the struggle to preserve Cook Forest – would lead to animosity by McCreight for Pinchot.



President Theodore Roosevelt (left) and Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot on the river steamer Mississippi in October 1907.

Courtesy Library of Congress

McCreight relates in his book, *Cook Forest State Park*, that at the same time he was involved with the construction and development of the Wigwam, he read a magazine article dealing with wasteful practices by lumbermen on the Pacific coast. Being familiar with both eastern and western lumbering he soon addressed a letter to President Theodore Roosevelt,

with whom he shared a common experience of living in Dakota territory, insisting the president take a stand against wasteful practices.

Roosevelt replied that he had already spoken about the practice at two conventions and referred the letter to the U. S. Department of Forestry, a division of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. William L. Hall, assistant forester, answered the letter, agreeing to the condition of the forests, but nothing could be done about it.

McCreight replied insisting the president needed to make preservation of woods and waters part of national policy. He got what appeared to be a standard reply from Hall with the message, “would you be kind enough to say specifically just what the President should do?” Taking up the challenge, McCreight responded.

In *Cook Forest State Park* McCreight recalled, “the writer prepared and submitted a line of action, which he told him he would adopt if he were the president; and Mr. Roosevelt did adopt it.”

The seven-page letter covered three separate and distinct divisions of the program: call a meeting of the representatives of the people to discuss the subject; withdraw immediately from sale all timbered public lands; and start a campaign of education by making a speech before DuBois High School. The latter suggestion, no doubt, tied into McCreight’s duties with the DuBois School Board.

By 1908, Roosevelt called the governors of several states to a general conference on the subject, leading to several national Conservation Congresses. McCreight represented Pennsylvania at two of them.

The Minnesota Conservation and Agricultural Development Congress, March 16-19, 1910, in St. Paul, Minnesota, featured speeches by President Roosevelt, and vice president and future President William Howard Taft. Another speaker at the conference was McCreight’s western employer James J. Hill. The Pennsylvania delegates included

another future Cook Forest activist, philanthropist and writer Arthur Briggs (A.B.) Farquhar (1838-1929), owner of A. B. Farquhar Company of York, Pennsylvania.

In addition to being a successful manufacturer and exporter of mechanical steel farming implements Farquhar also took the time to participate in the day's free trade versus protectionism debate. His main contribution to the national tariff debate was the 1891 book *Economic and Industrial Delusions: A Discussion of the Case for Protection*. The book was written as a direct response to the McKinley Tariff of 1890 and is very much an argument against the tariff by a disappointed former Republican.

According to McCreight, the delegation, "cooperated to secure valued advantages for the home state, in which the Congress decided national plans and policies."

The St. Paul meeting also brought to the forefront McCreight's conviction that he was the originator of Roosevelt's conservation policy, not Gifford Pinchot. He wrote in *Cook Forest State Park*:

"The reader will remember that the St. Paul Conservation Congress was one of the greatest national meetings ever held; and President Roosevelt's address was regarded as his most important as was also that delivered by Mr. Taft. James J. Hill's speech was discussed throughout the world; Senator Beveridge made his best oration here, and dozens of America's most noted statesmen delivered outstanding speeches, for here was being ratified the revolutionary principles of the new Conservation Policy, by the forty or more states and the country's people. It was at this meeting, that General Higby, New York State's noted delegate, demanded of the writer, to authorize him (Higby) to read before the session, the letters of the writer to Mr. Roosevelt and that which followed with Mr. Hall, which proved conclusively that it was M. I. McCreight and not Gifford Pinchot, as Mr. Roosevelt had stated in his speech, who had conceived the now famous Conservation Policy. However, the

American Antiquities Act of 1906

16 USC 431-433

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That any person who shall appropriate, excavate, injure, or destroy any historic or prehistoric ruin or monument, or any object of antiquity, situated on lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States, without the permission of the Secretary of the Department of the Government having jurisdiction over the lands on which said antiquities are situated, shall, upon conviction, be fined in a sum of not more than five hundred dollars or be imprisoned for a period of not more than ninety days, or shall suffer both fine and imprisonment, in the discretion of the court.

Sec. 2. That the President of the United States is hereby authorized, in his discretion, to declare by public proclamation historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest that are situated upon the lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States to be national monuments, and may reserve as a part thereof parcels of land, the limits of which in all cases shall be confined to the smallest area compatible with proper care and management of the objects to be protected: Provided, That when such objects are situated upon a tract covered by a bona fied unperfected claim or held in private ownership, the tract, or so much thereof as may be necessary for the proper care and management of the object, may be relinquished to the Government, and the Secretary of the Interior is hereby authorized to accept the relinquishment of such tracts in behalf of the Government of the United States.

Sec. 3. That permits for the examination of ruins, the excavation of archaeological sites, and the gathering of objects of antiquity upon the lands under their respective jurisdictions may be granted by the Secretaries of the Interior, Agriculture, and War to institutions which they may deem properly qualified to conduct such examination, excavation, or gathering, subject to such rules and regulation as they may prescribe: Provided, That the examinations, excavations, and gatherings are undertaken for the benefit of reputable museums, universities, colleges, or other recognized scientific or educational institutions, with a view to increasing the knowledge of such objects, and that the gatherings shall be made for permanent preservation in public museums.

Sec. 4. That the Secretaries of the Departments aforesaid shall make and publish from time to time uniform rules and regulations for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Act.

Approved, June 8, 1906

**The text of the American Antiquities Act of 1906
as published in the Congressional Record**

writer had already been convinced that Mr. Roosevelt was entirely innocent of any intention to wrongly give credit, since he had likely never seen the files which had grown up in the Forestry Bureau; nor had Mr. Pinchot, then the head of that bureau, ever shown him the letters which had been written. The writer felt that it would be wrong to stir up a near national scandal and place Mr. Roosevelt in an embarrassing situation after he had innocently, at least unknowingly, placed the crown of honor on the wrong head. It was possible to only restrain the valiant old General Higby, who had read all the letters, from clearing up the whole matter then and there, by promising him that he could have the files with that exclusive right as he insisted, to make them public at a later date. He died shortly afterward and the letter file has never been made public. Copies were given Mr. Taft at his solicitation, several years after he retired from the presidency. Mr. Taft's comment to the writer was, 'If I only had possession of this information at the time!'"

What did Pinchot believe? Timothy Egan in his book *"Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire That Saved America"* related Pinchot's side of the story from an inspiration in Rock Creek Park, Washington, D. C.:

"It was during a solo horseback ride on a February day in 1907 that Pinchot said he was struck by an idea that would bring together all things the Roosevelt administration was trying to do in the natural world. Forests, wildlife, clean water, and man's role in the midst of it, trying to shape the land through irrigation and fire suppression in the arid West. Pinchot wondered, "What was the basic link between them?" It was on the back of his horse, mulling these thoughts that Pinchot says he invented the idea of conservation as an overarching theme.

“Suddenly the idea flashed through my head that there was a unity in this complication,” he wrote in his memoir. “To me it was a good deal like coming out of a dark tunnel. I had been seeing one spot of light ahead. Here, all of a sudden, was a whole landscape.” It was a philosophy of the land grounded in Pinchot’s study of forestry, but more sweeping, with a moral, spiritual, and political dimension. “The earth, I repeat, belongs of right to all its people and not to a minority, insignificant in numbers but tremendous in wealth and power.” He took his idea to Roosevelt. “And T.R., as I expected, understood, accepted and adopted it without the smallest hesitation. It was directly in line with everything he had been thinking and doing. It became the heart of his administration.”

"Indeed, Roosevelt soon took to using the word “conservation” in his speeches and his proposals to Congress. Whether Pinchot and Roosevelt actually invented conservation is debatable. It takes many currents of thought, some from distant places, to form a river, and one of those most surely came from Pinchot’s mentor, John Muir. In 1901, the naturalist published a powerfully argued book, “Our National Parks,” a popular cry for true preservation. A dog-eared copy found a prominent home in Roosevelt’s library. But Pinchot and Teddy were the first to advance conservation for what it was—an executive branch agenda brought to the country with the full force of the bully pulpit.

“Using conservation as a rallying cry, Roosevelt took ever more vigorously to the task of expanding the national forests and national parks, and creating more wildlife refuges and other protected lands. And with the public behind him, he was emboldened.”

McCreight and Alice took advantage of the 1910 St. Paul Congress to add on a vacation, touring as a family the Dakota country of M. I.’s youth.

M. I. had nothing but praise for Alice as a traveler. “She was just as good a traveler or better than the husband,” he wrote. “Need but a half hour to prepare for any journey. Took half hour to prepare a trunk for the voyage to Austria in 1923. Few, if any married women got so much travel and had such glorious times as she.”

Again in 1920 this time accompanied by the last of their seven children, eleven-year-old Rembrandt, they made another return visit to the west. Rembrandt wrote his own account of the trip *A Boy Scout Goes West* published by Nupp Printing Company, Sykesville. While visiting North Dakota, the family attended the Sundance of the Sioux at Rosebud Reservation. Rembrandt was adopted as a member of the tribe by the old chief Etawasta – Good Face – and by Chief Spotted Tail, president of the big Indian gathering, often reported to be the largest ever held. Rembrandt was later christened a member of the Sioux tribe by Flying Hawk and four other chiefs.

Among Israel and Alice’s children Rembrandt’s story is tragic. His father’s writings convey the anguish that parents of any time period can experience.

“The youngest son developed a case of epilepsy – the fine young man and most popular in town was stricken with the

worst malady ever known to human ills,” lamented the father. “The suffering and torture he had to submit to, was terrible.”

The family hoped the trip through the Indian country and on to the west might aid in his recovery. It was not to be and despite consultation with a specialist in Chicago, Illinois; inquiries to Johns Hopkins, Rockefeller Foundation, and foreign sources, including St. Petersburg, Russia, the quest for a cure was futile.

Rembrandt secretly got married, M. I. confided about his son in his writing, “but instead of relief it went to worse conditions, until late in 1937 he passed on – helped by excessive worry and perhaps sleeping powders in excessive doses.” Rembrandt’s funeral was held at the Wigwam and a Sioux tribesman attended, demonstrating the great popularity and respect he had gained with the Indians.

“His was a sad and sorrowful death,” summed up his father. “He lies in the family plot in beautiful Morningside



Rembrandt McCreight (center) poses with Sioux Indians in 1929.

DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

Park Cemetery with his granite marker bearing his name Rembrandt P. McCreight, 1909-1937. Even in this wintry snow it bears a wreath of green. Along with his old time friends, Buffalo Bill, Iron Tail, Flying Hawk, Captain Jack and Scout Strahorn and Will Rogers, his spirit will never die. If the great God grants blessings to anyone he is sure to get a liberal share, for it is his due.”

The national conservation movement prompted similar efforts at the state level. When the Pennsylvania State Conservation Association was founded with Honorable A.B. Farquhar as president, McCreight was named secretary-treasurer. The organization grew just as public interest toward creating public parks in the state was growing.

McCreight wrote, “That was in pre-war times when the country was just coming into Big Business rule, to prevent which the President carried the Big Stick and did not hesitate to use it on occasion; it was the day of giant lumber operations, and most of the timber resources had already been exploited in the east, and were now in possession of the great corporations which were fast gathering in what remained in the south and west. The great Cook Estate was one which formerly a century (before) had been well cared for by Anthony Cook its original owner and the title to which was still held by his descendants; it was the only example of practical conservation on a large scale within the state. Here was a sample of what could be done in handling natural resource property when care, common sense and the exercise of intelligence is used in its management. Here was living proof of the arguments advanced for the Roosevelt Conservation policy; here could be preserved an everlasting monument for the guidance of future generations in the care and use of their forests and streams, their bird and animal life as well as for their own education, rest and recreation.”

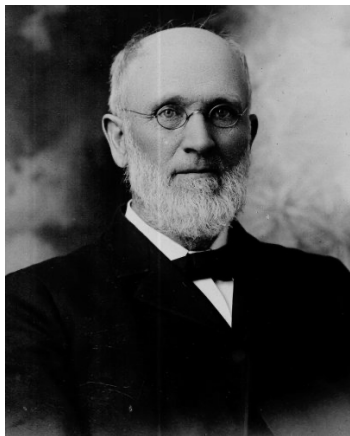
John Cook acquired a tract of land at what is now Cooksburg in 1826, and by 1828 he had created a small lot, put in crops, built a shanty, and moved his family to it over roads he had carved out from the forest. At or near the mouth of Tom's Run, he built a sawmill, floating his timber in rafts and lumber in barge-boats to Pittsburgh.

Anthony Wayne Cook, one of John Cook's 17 children by two wives, was born in Cooksburg and became the next owner of the property and business, A. Cook and Sons Company. Anthony and Thomas B. Cook were president and treasurer of the company. Anthony was estimated to be worth more than \$2 million, mostly in timber and lands, when McCreight and several others were invited to a weekend house party at the Cook home on the north bank of the Clarion River on Aug. 21, 1910. For entertainment Cook loaded his guests in automobiles and drove them over unimproved dirt roads through his property.

McCreight recorded the following story, "It was one of 'A. W.'s jokes to have his chauffeur discover a defect in operating the car which would require an hour or more to repair; this was to happen at a certain point some two miles from home just where the old trail crossed, that led in the direction of the mill on Tom's Run, and all the way through the giant pines. Too bad that something had to go wrong with the car so far from home, but the "walk would do them good" Cook would comment, as he led the way into the silent "temple of the gods" and then listen to the exclamations of astonishment that were sure to come from those who followed along the fern-bound path in this fairyland; often there was heard no comment, for in this silent cathedral of the Almighty, it was unuttered. Frequently it was observed that sturdy men could not restrain the tears, at the grandeur and solemnity of their environment."

During the walk after the automobile “breakdown” McCreight reported that he and Cook talked about the future of the property and the work of the Pennsylvania Conservation Association. He reported receiving, “hearty support” from Cook to preserve the forest.

McCreight took the information back to Farquhar as an opportunity for the Conservation Association. Farquhar, and civic leader and Harrisburg newspaper editor J. Horace McFarland, President of the American Civic Association, began a publicity campaign for the project. Farquhar also contacted Governor Edwin Stuart about the property’s suitability for becoming a state park. Stuart sent Simon Bolivar Elliott to examine the property.



S. B. Elliott
Courtesy Pennsylvania
Archives.

Elliott was born on Oct. 1, 1830, in Sheshequin, Pennsylvania, in Bradford County. He was trained as a mason, printer, teacher, architect, and engineer. He served in the Pennsylvania Legislature in 1861-62, representing Tioga County. During his lifetime, Elliott worked as an architect in Mansfield, Pennsylvania, where he also served as burgess (mayor); was manager for the Arnot Coal Mine in Tioga County; mining engineer for

Blossburg Coal Company; general manager for Bell, Lewis & Yates Coal Company, Buffalo, New York.; and general manager of the Rochester and Pittsburgh Coal and Iron Company. He relocated to Reynoldsville in 1898, continuing to live there until his death on June 17, 1917.

At the time of his visit to the Cook property Elliott was a member of the State Forestry Reservation Commission, which evolved into the Department of Forestry. An early conservationist, Elliott promoted the idea of creating a nursery to raise trees for planting in the surrounding area. In 1911, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania established the Clearfield Forest Tree Nursery in a mountain pasture atop Penfield Mountain. It was later renamed for District Forester William F. Dague who handled its operation from 1911-47. The nursery was closed in 1978, but its buildings are still used as the Moshannon State Forest maintenance headquarters and the seed orchards still supply seeds for the other state nurseries.

In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) established Camp S-116 on land along the edge of the nursery, building cabins, pavilions, roads, trails and many other buildings still in existence. That same year, the former Department of Forests and Waters erected a plaque dedicating Simon B. Elliott State Park.

Accompanied by McCreight, Elliott was given a bobsled tour of the Cook Property on a bitterly cold day. Impressed, Elliott endorsed the Cook property as a public park, recommending the state purchase it without delay. The Pennsylvania general assembly responded by passing a bill appropriating expense funds and appointing a commission to further examine the issue.

Cook set the price, with reservations of oil and gas rights, as \$600,000. The commission, after a personal investigation, recommended the purchase at that price, but a House bill was sent to an appropriation committee, where it remained when the legislature adjourned.

“However, it was whispered around with significant winks, that there was no ‘inducement’ offered by the promoters to secure the passage of the bill, and therefore members were not greatly interested to dip out so large a sum from the public tax funds when there were no drippings,”

declared a sarcastic McCreight about the results. "But that was mere gossip and the promoters of the Forest paid no heed to such idle talk; they accepted the result as something that could not be helped and went on with their work of spreading the gospel of saving the trees."

The effort, which included trips, speeches, printing, postage, circulars, and photograph albums made for libraries, clubs, and societies showing Cook Forest, piled up bills that came back to the campaign organizers.

The first public news about the possibility of acquiring Cook Forest appeared in an article in the *DuBois Daily Express* on Jan. 6, 1911. By Jan. 31, McCreight had received the Elliott report and had it published in the *DuBois Morning Courier*. Two hundred copies of the Elliott Report were printed in pamphlet form for distribution to the Pennsylvania House and Senate and various clubs and societies.

By May 22, 1911, a bill was passed by both houses of the state legislature and signed by Governor John K. Tener, who appointed a legislative commission to examine the Elliott report. McCreight reports his own intense lobbying effort by correspondence and conference attendance, always at his own expense, to obtain a favorable report. The effort took him to the powerful *Philadelphia North American* newspaper which published a series of articles about Cook Forest, culminating in a large front-page article with photos on Feb. 3, 1913.

The efforts, however, were not successful, with the legislature failing to act upon the state park plan. This placed in jeopardy the entire Cook Forest effort, but Cook, who was facing increasing financial difficulties, agreed to wait longer rather than cut down the big trees under his protection.

Continuing their lobbying efforts in 1912 to prepare for the next legislative session, the commission circulated its report widely and held dinners, conferences, and special meetings to discuss various ways of handling the property when it was a state possession.

Cook, a member of the Duquesne Club in Pittsburgh, invited prominent Pittsburgh residents to Cooksburg to view the forest firsthand. Among those attending a fall 1912 tour were Thomas Liggett, John M. Phillips and John Nicholson, who enthusiastically supported the idea and threw their own support to the effort.

In addition to lobbying to get the proper legislators on the committee to consider the request, the Cook Forest backers worked on preparing the proper legal forms including title papers, surveys, estimates, originals of the many resolutions listed and filed, newspaper clippings, maps, and photo albums for a publicity campaign targeted at all of the newspapers in the state.

Representative S. Taylor North introduced the bill in the Pennsylvania House in 1913 and formed a special delegation from both branches of the legislature to come and inspect the property, hoping to expedite the passage of the bill. They did expect the Cook Forest promoters to pay for the visit, but funds were not available that purpose.

Rising to the challenge, a meeting was held at the Duquesne Club and money pledged by the Allegheny County Boy Scouts of America and their friends to provide mileage for the elected officials to visit Cooksburg. Cook arranged for the 17 miles of dirt road in the forest to be dragged to provide a smoother trip for the visiting dignitaries.

A line of automobiles drafted from Brookville, Clarion, Punxsutawney, and DuBois, met the 30 visitors at the Brookville train station, where their first stop was breakfast at the New Commercial. McCreight reported that the itemized bill to that point of the trip for sleepers, fares, cigars, incidentals and meals had already reached \$244.15.

McCreight's sarcastically evaluated: "The motorists succeeded in making the trip to the Cook home without serious interruption or injury to any of the royal participants. Here the party rested for a time, and then some of the members most interested joined in the drive through the trails on the property; a few got out of the cars and walked through the big timber with which they were duly impressed. Of the thirty officials, however, a majority seemed to be far more concerned to remain near the Cook mansion where it was announced luncheon would be served at 1 o'clock. When Mrs. Cook's delightful lunch had been disposed of the official party buzzed with plans for returning so that each of them could fill other dates they had made at various points in the territory on personal business, – and politics."

The audited June 3 bill was \$482.07 with the Boy Scouts providing a substantial share and local donations helping to meet all but \$32.07, which McCreight reported he paid. The result, the defeat of the Cook Forest Bill.

"Like all great moves for the general good, there were parties who could not or would not be convinced that so large a project as the purchase of Cook Forest would be negotiated without personal gain to some one in the form of commission, or just plain graft," evaluated McCreight, who also cited an editorial opposing the bill in the *Oil City Derrick* newspaper, Oil City, Pennsylvania, for the bill's defeat.

McCreight also could not be pleased with the members in the Senate and House who had been promising passage of the bill and now reported that there were not sufficient funds available to take it over. There were promises to make it happen in the next session.

He also related the story of a meeting with a "wise" politician, who provided some advice – employ an attorney and provide the attorney with \$50,000 to work with. The proposed bribe was beyond the reach of the Cook Forest group.

The problem became how to keep the property out of the hands of those who wished to conduct lumbering during the upcoming two years. The land already had accumulated two years of tax bills along with interest and two more years of such expenses also laid ahead.

Cook remained firm in his conviction to save the trees and during the summer and fall joined McCreight, D. L. Taylor, and H. B. Powell, in devising a plan to raise \$150,000 to liquidate floating bills of the estate, taxes, and to take over the holdings of the other members of the firm who no longer wanted to wait for a change at the State level. An auditing of the corporation's accounts and a re-estimation of the timber value and check of legal titles was undertaken.

Estimator V. M. Masters evaluated the 7,200-acre tract with a timber stand of 5,700 acres of hemlock, white pine, second growth white pine, oak, chestnut, cherry, ash, birch, beech, and maple totaling 55,000,000 feet. Based on this report, Taylor's Brookville Title and Trust Company and McCreight's Deposit National Bank funded a \$150,000 bond issue, which would save the forest for another two years.

Financial conditions were not strong at that time. The banking world was trying to establish a Central Federal bank of issue to meet the periodic strict currency standards, but the 1912 election of Democrat Woodrow Wilson as President of the United States brought to power the party opposed to this idea.

McCreight, serving as president of the Central Pennsylvania Bankers Association was appointed a delegate to the Committee of "Three Hundred" of America's principal bank officials. They met in Chicago, Illinois, with a goal of stalling a proposed regional system of 12 separate private-owned banks.

Because of the financial conditions the Cook Forest Association spent the latter part of 1913 increasing its preparedness through an educational campaign to sportsmen's groups, schools, lodges, and churches to be ready for the next meeting of the Assembly in 1915.

Several events conspired to slow the project again. In 1914, what would be eventually known as World War I broke out in Europe causing economic problems worldwide. There was also a new Pennsylvania governor, Martin G. Brumbaugh, who was not familiar with Cook Forest and who favored consolidating all the departments having to do with forests, water, game, fish and parks.

Jefferson County Representative Hiram H. Brosius introduced the bill for the purchase of the property. It was drawn up by C. Z. Gordon, attorney for the Cooks, at the original offer in fee including some 400 additional acres, since acquired, and including gas and oil, which had previously been reserved. The cost was \$800,000, payable in installments with \$300,000 on Sept. 1, 1915, \$250,000 on July 1, 1916; and \$250,000 on July 1, 1917.

Despite Governor Brumbaugh's interest in Cook Forest the legislature failed again to provide money for its purchase. On July 17, 1915, McCreight wrote to Cook suggesting another try at finding private financing to purchase the property. In a reply on July 23 Cook gave his consent for McCreight to find private support.

While all of the maneuvering was being conducted by the Pennsylvania Conservation Association, Liggett and several other prominent men from Pittsburgh formed the Wild Life League, a state-wide organization for lobbying legislators on matters of conservation.

McCreight's summary: "Copy of a statement of the financial condition of the Cook Sons Co., and draught of a contract shows that a meeting was held at the Seventh Avenue Hotel, Pittsburgh, at which it was planned to buy out the interests of T. B. Cook and the two sisters representing the

one-half interest in the property. A. W. Cook was to take over their interests and the purchase to be financed by him with the aid of D. L. Taylor and the writer. The memorandum is dated October 28th, 1915.”

At the annual meeting of the Wild Life League at Conneaut Lake in 1915, a committee was appointed to cooperate with committees from other and similar organizations for acquiring Cook Forest. McCreight was named chair of that committee and the forestry committee. Joining him on the Cook Forest committee were: Wildlife League President R. T. Brown of Ellwood City, U.S. Steel Company; John H. Nicholson of Pittsburgh, U.S. Steel Company; Thomas Liggett of Pittsburgh, 1st National Bank, Pittsburgh; legislators H. H. Brosius of Brookville, Henry I. Wilson of Big Run, and Joseph Phillips of Clearfield; Senator H. H. Arnold of Clarion; and E. A. Weimer of Lebanon. This committee met with the Cooks to discuss plans for the Wild Life League to take over the property

One of the suggestions was to sell 24,000 Wild Life League life memberships, at \$25 each, to raise \$600,000. That is a substantial amount of money in a time period when the average annual earning for workers was \$687. There was some hope that 3,000 of the current members would agree to pay \$200 each to reach the same amount. They also hoped to receive outside support from organizations such as the Boy Scouts, the Daughters of the American Revolution, The Forestry Association, and The Conservation Association, along with prominent individuals. Two individuals had volunteered to supply \$15,000. The plan was to provide first mortgage bonds or stock, so if the state wished to take over Cook Forest in the future it could do so.

Solicitations were made and McCreight reported the only response came from Nicholson who provided some wisdom related to the idea. In a letter, Nicholson advised that while the Wildlife League’s goal was worthwhile, the organization was

too new to be able to find the support it would need to raise that amount of money.

Another Wildlife League proposal to raise money to purchase Cook Forest followed a meeting between McCreight, Frank Hahne, owner of DuBois Brewery, and W. H. Cannon, with Harry Davis, Lady Grace McKenzie, and E. M. Shelly. Davis along with John Harris, had opened the first theatre exclusively created for the showing of motion pictures on Smithfield Street in Pittsburgh. McKenzie was a filmmaker and big game huntress and Shelly a noted big game hunter.

Davis proposed to manage a fund-raising campaign by showing an African big game movie provided by the Lady McKenzie Company. The cost: \$36,000 in cash to get the picture released. Far less than the \$600,000 goal of the life membership campaign, but still a considerable amount of money.

Logically, complications arose. During an extended negotiation period McCreight explained, “ – when it came to signing on the dotted line there was a sudden drop in enthusiasm.” Eventually, a call was issued for \$9,218 to release the motion picture, but the money had to be secured through a bank loan instead of subscriptions.

On December 29, 1915, the following underwrote a bank loan: McCreight, Frank K. Brown of Brookville, J. H. Pentz of DuBois, and C. C. Hoover, \$1,000 each; and Jason B. Sansom, \$500. Wildlife League President Brown added \$1,000 and director M. A. Riley, \$500; well short of the needed amount, resulting in the failure of the idea.

Nicholson’s prophesy came true in January 1916 when solicitations for life memberships also failed. With World War I approaching and taking the attention of both business and government, the Cook Forest effort took another big hit and left the Wildlife League waiting for the next legislative session in 1917. Pre-session work started in May with Pittsburgh *Gazette-Times*, *Post*, and *Dispatch* newspapers all

publishing special articles and photo illustrations encouraging legislative action on Cook Forest.

On April 2, 1917, President Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany, marking the United States' entry into World War I. Sixteen days later, Congress passed the Selective Service Act authorizing the registration and draft of all men between 21 and 30 for military service.

McCreight was one of the first to be drafted, not as a soldier, but as an appointee to the three-member Clearfield County draft board, which included the Clearfield County sheriff. It was the only time the Major was to be involved with military affairs. He served as board secretary and later termed the task formidable, wholly unappreciated, and thankless.



World War I draft board (1917-18). From left: E. C. Shields, Dr. S. M. Free (chairman) and Major Israel McCreight.

DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

“War in Europe took all the time and attention of the writer; as clerk of Local Board No. 2 his duties kept him days including Sundays, and night to midnight, in the war-office,” he wrote.

Three of his sons served. Donald was at Hog Island and at the war camp just outside of Philadelphia; while the twins, Jim and Jack, were in the U. S. Navy at Bremerton, Washington.

Hard feelings toward the draft board were difficult to avoid and McCreight’s bitterest memory was a conflict with Frank Hahne, DuBois Brewery owner. Hahne had brought the brewery to DuBois in 1895 with McCreight throwing his support to the business.

But a draft classification caused a problem. McCreight wrote, “Frank Hahne, son of the president of the Brewing Co., was classified by the writer in Class 1A to go to the front along with his own sons and others; the father set out to have his son exempted – used every strategy known to keep him from the army. It created a noteworthy uproar in the town. The writer was blamed for the long period that elapsed after he had been called; this was false – he never consented to a reclass, and called him repeatedly for service – until gradually the public got to realize what was holding him out – it was his father – appealing to this and that authority, until, finally he got a reversal from the state special agent, and sent the boy west to get him away from the bitter feeling against him.”

The situation festered until 1919, when the passage of Prohibition led to the final split between McCreight and the elder Hahne.

Years later, McCreight wrote, “To show what effects the Volstead Act (the National Prohibition Act) had in places – the president of the big brewing company called the writer – then secretary of that corporation – to the office, and proposed and demanded that a deed be made to him for the entire property, insisting that the secretary then and there record on the minute book a resolution authorizing that deed to be made.

“Owner of about ten per cent of the capital, the secretary refused to be a party to such an outrage. Because of this and the classification of the son during the war, a friendship lasting for many previous years, was broken. Thereafter the president, who controlled the majority of stock which the secretary had helped him to accumulate, cut off all further personal relations with the old friend – got a new secretary who would obey dictatorship.

“A member of the Kaiser’s American staff, he was well regarded generally, the test for loyalty to his adopted land, was wholly secondary to that of his German homeland. May his spirit rest in peace! The son, whom I had classified for the armed forces, is now the father’s successor as president and manager of the very fine brewing plant. It may be guessed how he loves the man who caused so much furor over his escape from war service in World War I. We stand for the final judgment! With his secret and liberal cooperation with another conspirator, every effort to break the writer financially, was tried, -- and failed dismally.

“But, after all, this is but one of several cases where friends that had been helped to affluence, proved false in the end! However a clear conscience is ours. That is the one and only sure!”

Despite McCreight’s negative reaction to this experience, the local newspaper found the board’s work praiseworthy. *The DuBois Courier-Express* in its December 11, 1918, edition reported that the local Selective Board Office closed to the public the previous day. During the course of the war the newspaper reported the board had handled approximately 7,000 cases and sent 647 men into camps. About 2,000 men were physically examined and their status determined.

Summing up, the article stated: “The board composed of Dr. S. M. Free, M. I. McCreight, and E. C. Shields has worked with the one idea in mind, that of supplying men to the army whenever and whatever numbers were desired. In this respect they have been unusually successful and District No. 2 always

supplied its quotas, in several instances sending more men than the call indicated. In accomplishing this noteworthy task they have always retained in their minds, the consideration that was due to the community and the individual, but of course, the needs of the nation came first. They never hesitated to decide a case on its merits and in every individual case it will be found that the transactions of the local board and its decisions were strictly in conformity with the facts as ascertained by them after careful and thorough investigation. The board had a tremendous task before then and the members are deserving of the thanks of the community for the splendid manner in which they performed it, with the help of efficient assistants.”

With the nation, state, and his own personal attention turned toward the war, McCreight's efforts on Cook Forest were curtailed. Others continued the effort, but with similar results. During 1917, the State House passed the Cook Bill during the session by a 163-12 vote, demonstrating the popularity of the idea among the people of the state. The Senate, however, was another matter. McCreight blamed the bill languishing in the clutches of the Buckman Committee until adjournment of the session on “Big Politics”. He wrote, “Again the writer was told that the mistake had been made in not employing a ‘special attorney to grease the skids’ – but he was, as always, unconvinced.”

The war kept the Cook Forest project dormant in 1918, but revived with the armistice of November 11, 1918. A change in Pennsylvania politics would also change the outlook.

W. C. Sproul was the new Pennsylvania governor. A former state senator, Sproul was a supporter of the Cook

project. However, post-war deflation, caused by the withdrawal of federal funding for bank loans made to farmers and cattlemen to produce more food during the war, resulted in bank failures and general business decline.

Sproul put off the Cook purchase during the 1919 session and the inaction continued until 1921. During the interim, A. W. Cook sold some of his western holdings and bought out some associates leaving him less pressed for immediate action.

The tide began to turn during a McCreight visit to Harrisburg to gather data related to state roads for another of his interests, the local road association, for which he was the secretary. Completing that business, he visited the capital where the Cook Forest supporters came to him to ask why there was no bill. He reported to them, “that there was no use trying to get a bill through when there was no profit in it for anyone.”

Gifford Pinchot had also returned to the picture, serving as Commissioner of Forestry in the Sproul administration; an appointment McCreight wrote, “to prevent interference with bigger party politics and politicians.” The group of legislators meeting with McCreight believed they had the votes to pass the purchase and determined to see Pinchot immediately, trooping to his office and asking where he stood on the Cook park.

McCreight described the meeting, “The genial official rose from his chair and raised his arms by way of emphasis and declared the he was ‘for the Cook Forest park, – provided the Governor favored it’ – he would go along with the Governor, – ‘Yes sir, gentlemen, I am for the forests everytime.’”

Fortified, the delegation gathered Pinchot and determined to visit Governor Sproul immediately.

Again, McCreight provided a description of what occurred. “The long line passed through the door of the Governor’s private office, – all but Pinchot. Just as the writer

stepped over the threshold, Pinchot suddenly left the line and disappeared, he was not with the delegation when it came to face the Governor.”

Sproul declared his support to purchase Cook Forest. McCreight wrote that Sproul addressed him, “Mac. Why can’t we get Cooks to let us take the big property in section so that it will not take so much money all at one time, to pay for it? – Suppose we take over, say 2000 acres this year and then the rest in pieces each year until it is all taken; we can get the section with the big trees first so as to be sure of saving them and thus, by dividing the property, it will be easily met with say, – \$250,000 or \$300,000 each term – suppose you go back and get them to make that kind of proposition and we will get right behind it and put it over.”

McCreight was skeptical that such a plan could be arranged because of the need to measure out exact acreage, estimating the stumpage on it, and fixing a price at stumpage rates for the timber, which might stand on the acreage selected. The delegation, however, agreed to the idea.

Back home, McCreight also found A. W. Cook agreeable to the proposal and had his attorney draw up an option on the property meeting all of the governor’s requirements. The option was sent on to Sproul who referred it on to Pinchot and the Forestry Commission.

Shortly, Pinchot summoned McCreight to Harrisburg for a Forestry Commission meeting. McCreight’s memory of the meeting had him being requested to tell the board about the Cook Forest proposition and replying that the document should be read because it told the story and met the governor’s requirements. He also noted that highly respected Dr. J. T. Rothrock could tell them more about the physical features of the forest. Rothrock (1839-1922) was recognized as the “Father of Forestry” in Pennsylvania.

Requested to return at noon to hear the commission’s verdict McCreight optimistically retreated to the hallways of the capital, where he was approached by a man who asked

about the price of the Cook Forest property. McCreight replied with the standard answer of \$600,000. His unknown conversationalist told him that a bill for \$750,000 would prevent any delays in an affirmative action.

Taken aback, McCreight inquired as to the man's identity and who he represented. The man told him he was a member of the House and managed the "slush funds".

Approaching Pinchot's office at noon, he reported the State Forest Commissioner came to the door with a broad grin and said, "I'm sorry McCreight, we voted against your Cook Forest proposition." Pinchot explained that S. B. Elliott and Rothrock both voted against the proposal. McCreight knew that the claim about Elliott was ridiculous because everyone knew Elliott had long advocated the purchase of the property and was the first to make an authorized report recommending it to Governor Stuart in 1911.

"Disappointment, discouragement, disgust! – this was the frame of mind of the writer as he boarded the train for home," wrote McCreight. "In the final analysis of the Pinchot attempt at deception there was but one answer; he had gained his advancement, from a clerk in the forestry bureau of the Department of Agriculture, through false credit for 'originating' the Roosevelt Conservation Policy and as the writer was the victim, it would never do for him to further a project that might lead to historical research; the success of the Cook Forest movement might bring its sponsor too much into the limelight and inspire inquiries that might lead to discovering the real author of the Roosevelt policy; ah! that would never do. So long as Pinchot held state office in Pennsylvania, there would be no chance for Cook Forest Park legislation, that was clear."

On April 6, 1921, McCreight wrote to Governor Sproul explaining his view of the events: "Wishing to be of service to you, at the request of Mr. Pinchot, I appeared before the Forestry Commission yesterday where the Cook proposition was being considered. After the meeting was over, – Mr.

Pinchot told me that the Commission had voted against it, ‘because Mr. Elliott had opposed the project’ – that is evidence of gross ignorance – or deliberate slander.

“There was not disposition on the part of the Cooks, or anyone else to take up with the Legislature the purchase of the forest at this time, until I happened in the Hall of the House some weeks ago on other business, when several members inquired why the Bill was not before the House. At their request, I accompanied the delegation to Mr. Pinchot, – and they were assured of the hearty cooperation of the Department, if the Governor favored it; they visited you to learn what your attitude would be; – it was at your request that I secured the proposition you now have, – and which was before the Commission yesterday.

“There is no disposition to embarrass you; neither do I want to be embarrassed with further loss of time and money in trying to do a good thing for the people of Pennsylvania, if I am ‘up against’ an unknown, and unknowable quantity; – to have this last effort to save the big pines, end up in this ridiculous fashion, is embarrassing to us all; therefore in justice to yourself, to the Cooks, to me and to the public, it is incumbent upon us to go through with it or call it off. If for any reason, you decide to not go forward with the project, please notify me and the option will be withdrawn.”

With good reason, a totally disgusted Cook withdrew his option to the Governor within several days of receiving McCreight’s report.

This notice prompted Sproul to reply, “There are various features about the Cook Forest proposition which, I do not believe will commend themselves to you, and which I shall be glad to explain to you when I see you, – we should like to own the Cook tract, but the proposition they make us is one which neither the Forestry Department nor myself could approve.”

McCreight’s scathing reply to Sproul on April 11 indicated his distaste for the entire matter: “To add to the amazing things that happen, there have been two more

amazing things come to me this morning. To add to the ridiculous statement of the Forestry Commission, last week, declining to recommend the Cook Forest purchase for the reason it had been opposed by Elliott, when as a matter of fact he was its best champion; this morning mail brings two letters; – one says it discloses to you some features, – ‘which you will explain when you see me’, – and the other letter tells me that you told a certain party ‘that the State was not considering the purchase of the Cook tract at all.’

“I regret very much that you did not tell me this when the (Cook) matter was discussed; it would have saved very considerable expense to me and a lot of work and upset plans for the Cooks. You gave me to understand it was a matter wholly of revenue, since which the new revenue measures were passed, and I supposed that was all that you waited for; if you had no intention to seriously consider the matter, you should have told me then.”

This fiasco ended the 1921 attempt to conserve the forest. McCreight estimated that the now 11 years of work had cost \$10,000 to learn, “that practical politics was – and still is – a ‘racket’ – and that common sense, common honesty and conservation, do not count with politicians.”

It also led to the realization that if the property would be saved for the people it would have to be done by popular subscription. Pittsburgh banker Liggett again endorsed this effort.

Arthur Farquhar, however, took matters into his hands. Farquhar had met with all of the presidents from Abraham Lincoln through then President Warren Harding, along with all Pennsylvania governors. He had many contacts and set out to create the State Conservation Council, with all current existing conservation organizations electing a representative to arrive at a common policy.

The first meeting was held at the University Club in State College, Pennsylvania, on January 30, 1922. Among those attending were the heads of the Pennsylvania Departments of Forestry, Game and Fish, a number of heads of game and fish associations, Penn State University President John Thomas, and other college officials. That meeting resulted in a call for a state-wide meeting on March 30-31, 1922, in State College.

Dean R. L. Watts of State College presided over the convention, which represented nearly 200,000 members of state-wide organizations in addition to 13 district and county sportsman's clubs and conservation associations representing thousands more. Rothrock, Thomas, Florence Dibert of the State Federation of Pennsylvania Women, and Major R. Y. Stuart gave speeches. A motion was approved to organize the State Conservation Council and a committee was appointed to prepare by-laws for the next day. McCreight served on that committee along with Judge A. S. Heck, David Pritchard, Henry W. Shoemaker, John M. Phillips, Dr. Henry S. Drinker, and Gary Hoover.

In addition, resolutions were passed providing approval of greatly widening activity on the part of Pennsylvania toward purchase of forestlands and providing for forest protection, plus better regulation of fish and game laws.

The new organization's constitution and by-laws were approved during the second day of the convention. Watts was elected president; Dibert, R. T. Brown, and Pritchard, vice presidents; McCreight, treasurer; and J. A. Ferguson, secretary. McCreight turned over the \$500 remaining in the treasury of the State Conservation Association to the new organization.

Almost immediately, a new problem arose. The Clarion River Power Company received approval from the Public Service Commission on Nov. 14, 1922, to dam the Clarion River to provide additional sources of water and waterpower. Such action would have destroyed the plans for Cook Forest. The new organization along with many other groups in

Pennsylvania's western counties worked to prevent the damming of the Clarion River during the remainder of the year.

Politics also changed again in Pennsylvania. Railroad and coal strikes caused discontent across the state and when the votes were counted in the gubernatorial election, Pinchot was Pennsylvania's new governor.

"This result was unlooked for generally; and for those who had worked so long and faithfully to save the Cook woods, it was a surrender of hope for legislation for saving the woods for the people," wrote McCreight. "Though posing as the people's champion in all that related to forest and conservation, Pinchot had never visited the Cook Forest, nor did he ever indicate the least interest in it or to aid in what he could not help knowing was the wish of the people to have it preserved for a public park. His deceitful conduct in the last year's legislative effort was sufficient warning to the friends of the Cook project, to save themselves further negotiations with the Administration, now that he was at its head."

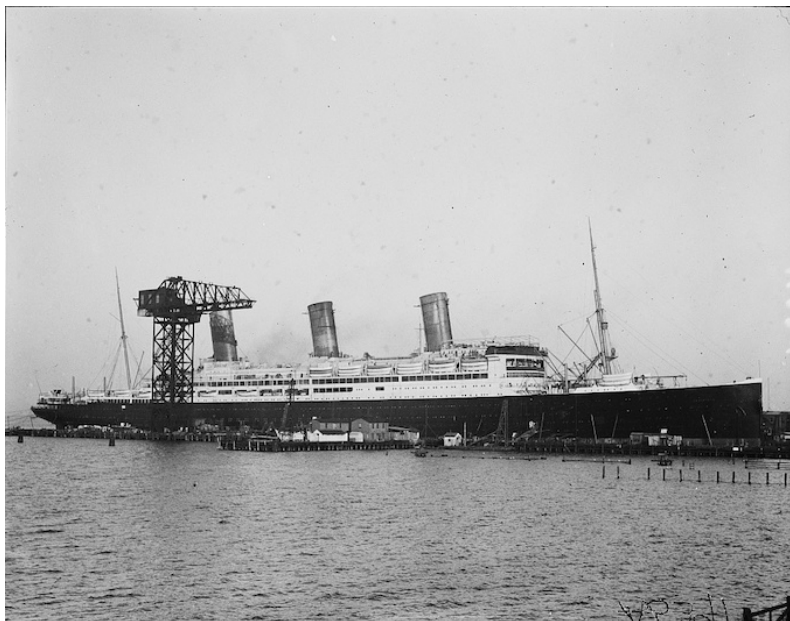
The four-year Pinchot administration left the Cook supporters with few options. Liggett took the lead in the effort to secure the underwriting syndicate that would take over the legal title to the Cook property. The goal was about \$20,000, with the first \$10,000 to defray expenses for preparing suitable literature, secretarial and clerical salaries, creating facilities for visiting the park, and promoting the project.

Also, to be faced was how to meet an estimated \$25,000 mortgage taken out by McCreight, Taylor, and a Pittsburgh banker many years before, for the proposed underwriting had not been assured. T. B. Cook, residing in Arizona, decided at that time to cancel any further negotiations on the matter. McCreight, when he returned from a September through November 1923 trip to France and Austria, found a wildly tangled affair to unravel.

Israel and Alice, celebrating 35 years of marriage, had embarked on the pleasure/business trip to Europe. The business originated with the big New York banks, which had asked the McCreights to call on their corresponding agents in Paris, something M. I. found to be quite a compliment.

They traveled by train to New York City before setting forth on a cross-Atlantic voyage aboard the Leviathan, the flagship of the United States Line. Captained by Herbert Hartley the Leviathan was the largest passenger ship in the world when it was built in 1910; one where full-dress apparel was required to eat at the captain's table.

The trip was not an easy one, especially for Alice. Early on she became seasick and then they were battered by a storm with winds in the 100 mile per-hour range, stirring up waves



The Leviathan took the McCreights to Europe.
Courtesy Library of Congress

estimated at 70 feet. M. I. expected the ship to sink as they experienced a 45-degree roll. A steel door on the third deck and three port holes were broken and there was damage to the liner's big salon and grand parlor.

Arriving safely at Cherbourg, France, one and one-half days late because of the storm, the McCreights took a train to Paris, where they found their hotel reservations were cancelled. They had to go on to Versailles, where they stayed at the Trianon Hotel, where Georges Clemenceau dictated the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I, in the hotel's reception salon.

"A couple of days was spent seeing the wonders around Versailles, with a trip to the city to buy a pair of gloves for the madam – what a wild waste!" commented the always fashion unconscious McCreight.

He also commented, "There was enough gold in the Versailles palaces to pay all the debts of the war, and, as we walked through the Hall of Mirrors we wondered why (President Woodrow) Wilson was outgeneraled by the Clemenceaus, Orlandos the British Lions! But, when we went down the hill to wander in Marie Antoinette's Little Trianon, and see Napoleon's sleeping place, we understood. The French are smart!"

They were not permitted to travel in Germany due to post-World War I travel restrictions, so they took the Oriental Limited train through Switzerland to Vienna, Innsbruck, and Salzburg before going back to Paris. They were told (and perhaps all tourists at the time were told the same) that they were the first Americans to visit Austria since the end of the war.

In Paris, they hired a Cadillac and American driver for \$70 to take a trip over the war fields – Meaux, Chateau Thierry (where they viewed the Germans' "Big Bertha" cannon), Belleau Wood, and Riems, Soissons, and Compeigne. With some amusement and surprise M. I. added the following about Alice during a stop at Senlis during the driving tour, "Here the

good lady walked up to the bar with us and drank a bottle of beer from the bar – just as if she was really used to it.”

Back in Paris, McCreight believed he got his revenge for the \$70 tour fee. He and Alice were sitting at an outdoor table eating sandwiches and drinking beer. A large Percheron horse came by followed by more hauling a block of granite. M. I. offered the horse his sandwich. The horse stopped bringing all to a halt, stopping passing cars and carriages.

Taking up the story in his own words, “They held-up half dozen lanes of passing cars and carriages, backed up as far as we could see in both directions; there were no drivers in charge of the front pulling nags – the leader, a ton-weight grey was on the walk at the entrance of the alley, alongside of which was the writer’s chair and table; he stood, nibbling at our elbow for another sandwich. We patted his nose, giving him a bite – while all this time the boulevard was like a vast battle ground – two armies facing – and the hundred gendarmes yelling and swinging clubs everywhere, horns blowing – it was a grand sight – one never before seen anywhere.

“No more sandwich, the big grey moved ahead. Altogether it was a get even for the outrageous charge for the battlefield trip.”

But France may have retaliated. McCreight paid \$10 (\$2 or \$3 U. S.) to have 50 photos printed, which never happened. Back home, he even appealed to Washington, D. C., which tried to get the photos or money returned without success.

Looking back McCreight wrote, “But, when we got aboard the ship for home, a glance back at France the picture that loomed was a nation stealing \$10. Just because the chance was offered. The French went down in our estimation to the bottom of the list.”

M. I. and Alice returned to the U. S. on the RMS Mauretania, sister ship of the RMS Lusitania, whose sinking propelled the U. S. into the Great War. It was the speediest ship of the British Cunard line. Another storm at sea made the

return trip another ordeal for the couple, but they also had some time for frivolity and introspection.

“On the way home about 2,000 miles out we took a Kodak of the Gulf Stream,” McCreight recalled. “It was water just like the rest of the ocean – and we wondered why it rained on the ocean; it could do no good – and was wanted when it should have fallen in Arizona – or in the Sahara. But the statue of Liberty looked good!”



**The Mauretania with the skyline of Brooklyn, N.Y.
in the background. The ship brought the
McCreights back from Europe.**

Courtesy Library of Congress

During this low point in the Cook Forest situation, McCreight, although maintaining his support for the project, expressed discouragement in a 1924 letter to Liggett: “It is the same with the Cook Forest that it always has been and will be,

with everything regarding welfare business. My own experience of more than ten years with the Cook Forest was that I had all the bills to pay with the exception of your help and Phillips', had most of the work to do; the job was too big for me to continue to pay for and devote so much time to, and I finally gave it up after Pinchot proved himself in the Sproul administration. The thing has cost me well on to \$10,000 in cash besides ten years of hard work . . ."

During 1925-26 A. W. Cook continued to stand firm in his conviction. Liggett continued the efforts but without much success to raise funds through a campaign. The final breakthrough came with a shift of the political winds in the election of 1926.

At that time, a Pennsylvania governor could serve only one term in office. That meant Pinchot was out. However, he would run again in the future and would serve a second term as governor.

The new governor was John S. Fisher, who fellow Republican McCreight lauded as "a Man of the People". M. I. would honor Fisher in the dedication of his book about Cook Forest. Born in Indiana County, Fisher graduated from Indiana Normal School (now IUP) in Indiana, Pennsylvania; later studied law and was admitted to the bar. He was elected a state senator in 1900 and came to the governor's chair as a practical conservationist and a supporter of the Cook Forest effort. Fisher Auditorium on the campus of IUP is named in his honor.

Liggett's fund-raising efforts were failing badly when the legislature lurched into action in 1927. A bill was prepared and introduced at the end of March providing for the appropriation of \$550,000 for the purchase of the Cook property with the Cook Forest Association to produce an additional \$100,000. Revisions followed and the final bill included a \$450,000 contribution by the state and \$200,000 from the Cook Forest Association, with the \$200,000 payable



Governor John Fisher
Courtesy Pennsylvania Archives

to the State Treasurer before the state's part of the funding would be released. The bill was passed and signed by Governor Fisher on April 14, 1927.

McCreight's telegram to Liggett upon hearing the news read, "Congratulations. Monument for you among the tall pines."

Liggett's reply was, "I received your telegram of congratulations but don't blame it all on me. Every person in Harrisburg and our friends on the outside did their full share in helping, – if there are going to be any monuments, I think they ought to be in the shape of totem poles, – don't let your people get cold on this for a minute – we don't have the total of the \$200,000 by a long shot."

Unable to pump any more of his own money into the effort, McCreight had to be content with writing solicitation letters. It was Liggett and Samuel Ramage who finally made the big breakthrough reaching R. B. Mellon and several other successful businessmen in Pittsburgh to find the money to put the project over the top.

In due time those who put their time, finances, and heart into Cook Forest received their monument. The fountain at the base of the Big Tree trail includes a set of twin plaques listing those who overcame a multitude of problems to preserve a virgin forest for future generations.

M. I. explained the effort in his own way in his forward to *Cook Forest State Park*:

"Thousands ask why and how this wonderful forest of towering pines, giant hemlocks and the endless variety of hardwoods in gardens of rhododendron, laurel and ferns, came to be preserved for the recreation, enjoyment and education of all the People for all time. They wonder that such a stand of priceless pine escaped the lumberman's axe when at the very door of America's active market.

"It is a hard and harrowing tale. Only the eighteen years of voluminous files, of letters, messages, reports, surveys, bills, pamphlets and official records, could supply the long and arduous campaign data, for writing the story of Cook Forest Park.

“Author of the *Cook Forest Park* project and in possession of the only connected authentic record of the history of it from the beginning to final consummation, the writer has expended time and labor to assemble the facts in form, that interested parties and future generations may know why and how it all happened.”

McCreight was also involved in big deals for timber and coal elsewhere. In Huntingdon, West Virginia, the sale of 30,000 acres of coal-timber lands was being held up by a tax problem. He conducted the negotiations between the two sides discovering that the deal had stalled because of no written agreement for \$305,000. The buyer agreed to provide the money to McCreight if he would guarantee the conveyance of the land.

He completed these negotiations on the same day that Fisher signed the Cook Forest property agreement. Summing up his day, McCreight wrote, “Thus the lone banker made the double deal – first the sale of the largest property in West Virginia to be destroyed – and the largest block in his own state to be preserved – all in one day – and all without written documentation. That was a time when the banker’s word was considered just as good as the bank itself.”

M. I. made a trip to Alabama to inspect a vast acreage of coal land; another to Tennessee to check coal deposits along the Tennessee River; and in Pennsylvania examined a large area of native road-building blacktop material and a railroad and smelting plant, west of Sheffield, Pennsylvania.

These ventures led him to another encounter with government graft. “A large corporation was formed in Washington (D.C.) by leading men to operate as a trust investment affair – named the writer as president, at a fancy salary; he went there to make a study of the layout,” he wrote.

According to M. I.'s writings, the corporation's directors included a navy commodore, the leading lawyers, the Comptroller of the Currency, and several prominent merchants. After spending a couple of weeks studying the group, McCreight came to the conclusion that something was crooked about what was going on. He immediately dropped from the organization.

"Smart lawyers, and a leading financier didn't see it," he reported. "The insider later was arrested and jailed. Then the big men on the board woke up. A month of time and considerable money thus wasted. No offer came to the writer to reimburse him. They were all nice fellows – but. It was a good lesson to learn how the big underworld flourishes in the capitol. It was merely one of the penalties suffered by the fellow who has earned a good reputation."

In 1925, McCreight was active in the Florida real estate boom, that attracted all levels of society including bankers.

Later in life he summed the effort up this way, "A quarter century later the final audit shows that the herein banker's loss was \$13,256 – and for the crowd, about \$150,000. By the 'crowd' we mean the local smart fellows, mostly bank directors. And that be added to about the same sum for wild gold-silver mining schemes, including oil and gas speculations, west and south. We came near forgetting a few chance throws at Lake-of-the-Woods, Montana – Idaho developments of sure things; also Kentucky oil – and Illinois oil. Looking back, it seems a big sum to spread around over the whole country – but that was the period and the way that the USA was built into the greatest country in the world. Out of this sort of whirl-a-gig, we see Theodore Roosevelt's parade of war-ships around the world, taking shape – for World War I was over and we were taking over the management of all the world. Amsterdam, London and Paris had surrendered to Wall Street; there the rainbow dipped into the pot of gold. The USA was going places; but should have

been staying at home; there was a tremendous job ahead – to rebuild the homeland!”

McCreight’s disgust for the political process, despite serving one term on the Republican State Committee, is apparent throughout his dealings both in Harrisburg and Washington, D. C. Questions could be raised as to why he did not join the politicians. Opportunities were present for him according to newspaper articles.

A Philadelphia newspaper mentions M. I. as a possible Pennsylvania congressional candidate in 1912; as did the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1918. The *Harrisburg Patriot* mentions him for the post of Highway Commissioner in 1922. McCreight, himself, sought to be named Commissioner of Indian Affairs, a federal position, early in the first administration of President Franklin Roosevelt. That might have been the one job he would have been willing to take and quite possibly would have made a difference for an entire race.

But, the answer to the join the politician question may lie in a recollection of his niece Dorothy Waldsmith. She recalled a story told to her, more than likely by her grandmother Eliza McCreight (M. I.’s mother, who died in 1918), about the outcome of a meeting in the boardroom at the bank. She recalled:

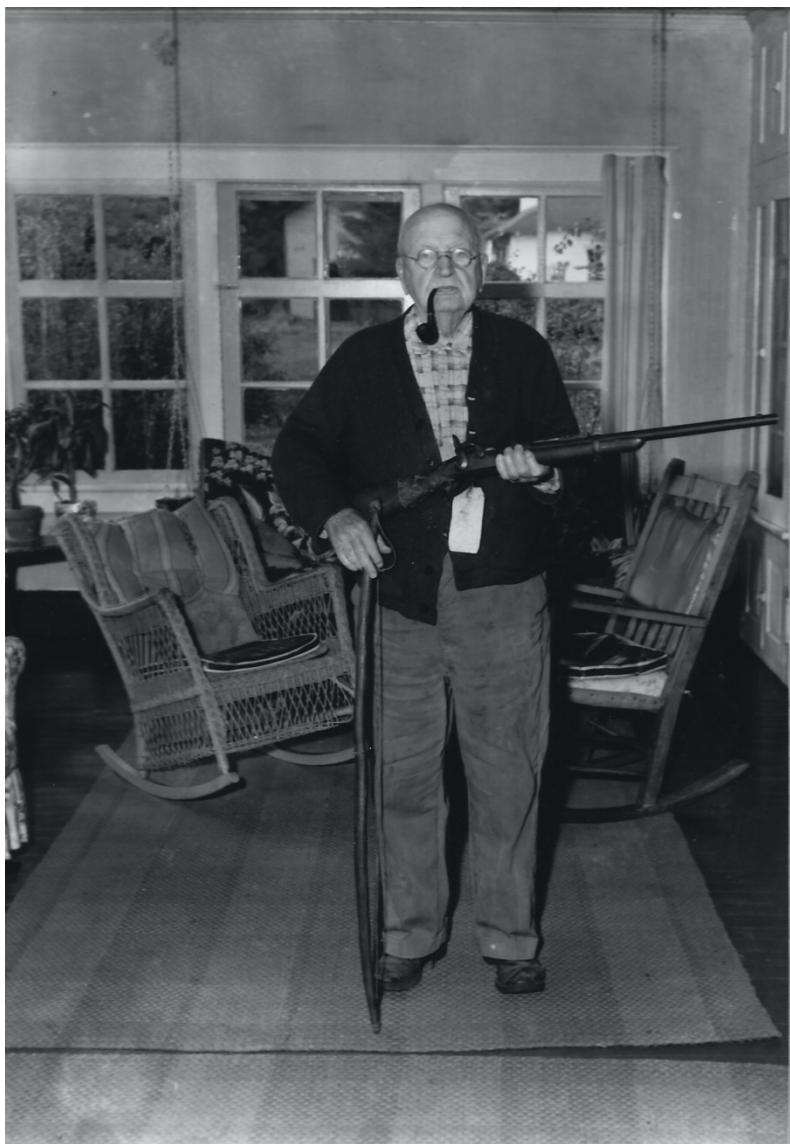
“Uncle Maj was in conference with some Republican politicians, who were trying to persuade him to run for a political office. Grandmother came into the bank, and went back to see her son. Uncle Maj introduced her and explained the situation. He said, ‘Mother, what do you think?’ She answered briefly, ‘The McCreights have always been honest, but they have never been politicians!’ Eliza left, and my uncle said, ‘Gentlemen, my mother has given my answer’.”

John (1821-1900) and Eliza McCreight (1830-1918) moved to DuBois when John retired leaving the family farm

in the hands of his eldest daughter, Susan, and her husband, Milligan McCloud McAdoo. John and Eliza built a spacious home on Brady Street flanked on either side by maple trees.

As the decade ended, McCreight, Governor Fisher, and Chief Flying Hawk had a memorable moment together in May of 1929. In an official ceremony conducted in Harrisburg, Flying Hawk officially transferred Sioux tribal leadership from Chief Flying Hawk to, "his dear friend of many years, Tchantanka," thus making McCreight chief of the Sioux.

During the ceremony, McCreight was presented with a tribal pipe. This pipe reportedly was handed to Flying Hawk by his uncle Chief Sitting Bull. Combined Sitting Bull and Flying Hawk had possession of the pipe for over 100 years prior to its presentation to McCreight. The pipe passed through several hands following McCreight's death and is currently part of the M. I. McCreight Collection at the Niagara Falls Museum.



**Major Israel McCreight in the Wigwam with one
of the rifles from his extensive firearm collection.
DuBois Area Historical Society collection.**

Part 5: First Citizen

At the conclusion of the Cook Forest preservation effort, McCreight was 62 years old. The year prior to Governor Fisher's signing of the 1927 bill creating Cook Forest, McCreight resigned his position as Deposit National Bank manager. However, he remained associated with the bank as new chair of the bank's board of directors. It had been 40 years since he accepted the assistant cashier's job at First National Bank and 37 years from the time he became involved with Deposit National Bank.

Even with Israel leaving the full-time operation of the bank, there was still a McCreight involved in the day to day operation – Bruce B. McCreight. Bruce, the second youngest of John and Eliza McCreight's children, was born on January 18, 1870.

Like his older brother, Bruce worked on the farm and attended country school until 18 years of age, when he walked the four miles to Reynoldsville for examination by the County Superintendent for a common school diploma. He took a commercial course at Eastman Business College, coming to DuBois in October 1888, the year of the big fire. He joined his brother at DuBois Deposit Bank, as a clerk at a salary of \$5 or \$10 every month.

Except for about two years when he served as assistant cashier of the Bank of DuBois which succeeded the First National Bank and three months in the summer of 1891 when he toured Great Britain and Europe, the England portion of which was made on a bicycle, he was in continuous service with DuBois Deposit Bank and its successor Deposit National Bank. He was made trust officer when the Deposit National Bank installed its trust department, and devoted much time and thought to the successful development of this department of modern banking.

In 1892 he married Miss Lillian Wise. They had two sons, Ian and Avenir.

The retirement of M. I. McCreight at age 62 from full banking duties may seem unusual today, but perhaps not for his time period. Israel had already passed the average life expectancy of a male in 1927, which was 59. He probably did not anticipate over 30 years more of life, since time period lifetime projections were for only an additional 14 to 15 years of life.

Time was not kind to most people during the decades following McCreight's retirement. A scant two years elapsed before the Stock Market crash of 1929, triggering the worst depression the world had ever experienced. Banks failed and closed, but Deposit National managed to keep its doors open, perhaps attributable to the solid business base on which it operated for over 40 years.

Israel and Alice lost nearly all of their money in the crash. The results were so devastating that newspaper advertisements at the time showed the McCreight's beloved Wigwam for sale. However, the property never changed hands, but pieces of the larger holdings were sold.

McCreight blamed the Federal Reserve Board's retrenchment, refusing loans and calling in outstanding loans, for the panic of the 1920s that contributed to the Great Depression.

"This policy broke most of the banks and about all the farmers in the land," he wrote over 20 years later. "During that terrible panic the young banker went west to learn at first hand what was happening – over the northern route west to Seattle, thence south to San Francisco and back over the Union Pacific; thence to Kansas City. At all stops he called on the banks and business men to see what was doing. Ranchmen all across the country were sheriffed, sold out, and left to wander.

It was terrible to see. Letters were written to the larger banks of New York telling them what was going on inland. Most of them replied in tones of appreciation of the conditions, but none had a remedy – blamed the government, and the banks who lent too much on land or livestock; the wreckage of this foolish move of the Federal Reserve Board, was as severe or more so, than any panic we had suffered to that time. It took several years to get back any sort of recovery in business and farming – then in '28-9 a real panic broke and before it was over, all banks were closed by government order – with only safe ones to reopen.

“Our own was one to reopen at once. Soon it was designated to take over one nearby bank classed as insolvent; this was done successfully. We had passed through all the panics – 1893, 1907, 1929 – all in good shape – and stood alone while doing it. Out of bank management for more than 20 years, it has been a great relief to be rid of the worry of other peoples’ troubles! And we stay out.”

McCreight, always a determined fighter, survived the financial problems and the Second World War, which followed.

In his writings McCreight, as could be expected, placed economics in the forefront of the causes of World War II. He believed that extravagant expenditures in Europe by the government led to the war. He frowned upon the loss of life, property destruction and economic debt created.

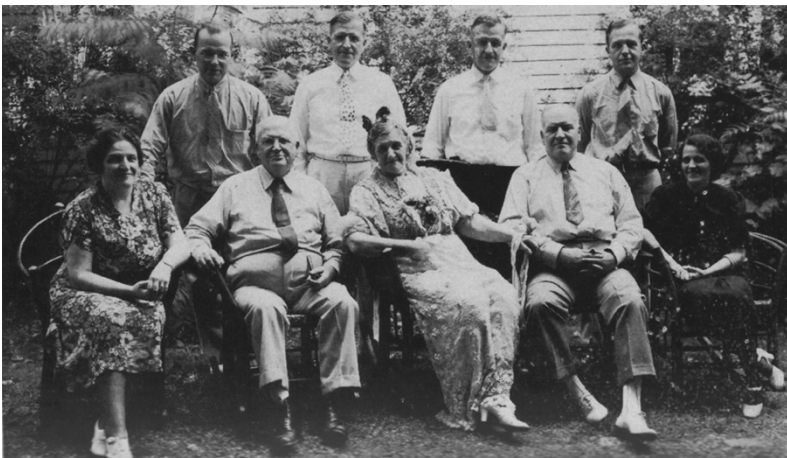
About the war’s conclusion McCreight wrote discouragingly, “By ’45 Hitler was ready to commit suicide – and did – giving credit to Russia and the USA for his defeat. Stalin and Roosevelt met; divided Germany into two parts – even the city of Berlin was cut in two slices – one for each – just the right scheme to inaugurate another war.” McCreight was incorrect about Germany’s division, the allies split it into four parts.

M. I. and Alice eventually cut their ties to downtown DuBois and moved full time into the Wigwam, which was rapidly becoming an empty nest. Life, however, was not easy for the aging couple.

“House enough for forty to live in, the two – all that are left of the original hoarde – have a good time taking care of it,” wrote McCreight in the 1950s. “Mother refused to have any help – she does all the cleaning, cooking, and other house-work – sweeping every day, and dusting every day all over the place – patching and darning – and puching (Note: meaning unknown) the big fireplace every hour of the day. She has become the expert injector —a shot in the arm every morning before breakfast – then the tests after breakfast – all because the Smicksburg doctor in Allegheny General Hospital says the writer has diabetes. Maybe he has but doesn’t know it.

“The coal shoveling has to be done to feed the boiler in the cellar, and three or four bucketfuls brought from the round-house for the kitchen stove and for the big fireplace in the library room that all takes a lot of time a trip to the cellar every two hours. The big automobile stands in the garage idle, and when the madam goes to town for her card parties each two weeks, she orders a taxi – claims she is afraid to ride with the old man because of snow and ice. And then, once a week, groceries are brought from the big Quaker store – and she does know how to cook.”

With time on his hands, M. I., who had devoted his life to his work had a whole new world to conquer in retirement. He had no interest in sports, calling football and baseball both Greek to him and he claimed to know nothing about playing cards. Movies did not appeal to him, nor did television when it arrived. He stated that radio came in handy for news when there was news worth hearing, which he declared was seldom. Nearly 50 years previously he had completed an oil painting, but none since, and once liked wood carving but no longer had the tools.



50th wedding anniversary in 1937. Seated from left are: Catherine (Stump), M. I., Alice, Don, and Martha (Swisher). Standing from left are: Major Israel Jr. (Tonk), Jim, Jack, and Rembrandt.
 DuBois Area Historical Society collection.



65th wedding anniversary in 1952. M. I. and Alice are seated in front surrounded by their children. From left: Major Israel Jr. (Tonk), Don, Catherine (Stump), Martha (Swisher), Jack and Jim.
 DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

He hunted and fished on occasion but seeing the waste of game killing in the west, he professed to do most of his hunting with a Kodak (camera).

“A real sport is that of horsebacking through the forests of the Wigwam estate; always two or more riding horses kept to saddle at any time for round trip of six to ten miles,” said McCreight. “Kodaking for wild things is real sport. Some rare pictures in the scrap books and albums! And many rare ones of the family over the past years are in the frames and binders around the Wigwam.”

Both he and his wife read, with *National Geographic*, *Reader's Digest*, *Time*, and *Life* magazines and the two daily newspapers providing the material. He also carried on extensive correspondence with people across the country. Always interested in current events and history he turned back to writing and because he enjoyed making speeches became a popular guest for many organizations.

Three of McCreight's most remembered works were produced during this time period: *Chief Flying Hawk's Tales: The True Story of Custer's Last Fight* published in 1936; followed by *The Wigwam: Puffs from the Peace Pipe* in 1943; and *Firewater and Forked Tongues: A Sioux Chief Interprets U.S. History* in 1947.

These books told the stories of Chief Flying Hawk (1854-1931), a frequent visitor to the Wigwam.

Flying Hawk, also known as Moses Flying Hawk, was an Oglala Lakota warrior, historian, educator and philosopher. His life bridged the late 19th and early 20th centuries for the Sioux. During his youth he fought in Red Cloud's War and was in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, where George Armstrong Custer and the 7th Cavalry were annihilated by the Indians. His first cousin, Crazy Horse, led the Indians in that battle.

Later in life Flying Hawk was a statesman for Native Americans making the effort to protect Indian families and

**Chief Flying
Hawk
photographed
at the Wigwam.
DuBois Area
Historical Society
collection.**



stop the misappropriation of their land by the federal government. At the same time, he urged his people to preserve their culture and heritage. He was an educator and believed public education was necessary to preserve Lakota culture. He visited many public schools to make presentations about his people.

Flying Hawk was one of many Native Americans, who continued to be a part of McCreight's life in retirement. McCreight kept up correspondence with those who could write. Many requests came to him for monetary help or help with legal problems. In most of these cases he could not be of any help except to write a supporting letter to the proper official. The requests, and M. I.'s efforts on the behalf of

Indians, confirmed their confidence in one they considered truthful, honest, and respectful.

The Wigwam was the home of McCreight's Indian artifact collection. It was one of the largest east of the Mississippi River, a source of pride for M. I.

On July 15, 1949, twelve Mohawk Indians from lower St. Lawrence County, New York, made their way to the Wigwam. According to a report in *The Courier Express*, Ray Fadden headed the Indian delegation on a tour of New York and Pennsylvania to visit monuments of their mother tribe, the Iroquois. They previously stopped in Buffalo to visit the monument of Red Jacket and then to Warren, Pennsylvania, where they visited the Cornplanter Monument. The Indians spent the previous night in Reynoldsville with Mrs. Johnson (first name not found in any of M. I.'s writings), a full-blooded Mohawk.

Their objective was to view McCreight's collection of Indian artifacts. The newspaper reported:

"Ray Fadden, and the adult members of his group, all intelligent men, marveled at the scope and excellent condition of Mr. McCreight's collection of Indian things. They recognized and interpreted the historic significance of the totems and endorsed the authenticity of the relics and signatures, the peace-pipes, head-dresses, wampum and many other items of such famous Chiefs as Sitting Bull, Iron Tail, Red Cloud and others of the famous Sioux Tribe, that make the McCreight collection valuable and historical."

During the visit McCreight received a surprise: The Mohawks adopted him into the Wolf Clan of their tribe. With it came a second Indian name. The Mohawks bestowed on him the formal tribal name To-ni-kon-rate, which translates as Deep Thinker.

At that point Israel held a unique and perhaps unprecedented position. McCreight, already a chief of the Sioux tribe (the newspaper article referred to him as the last living chief of the Sioux), and now as a member of the Wolf

Clan of the Mohawks, held positions in both Western and Eastern based Indian tribes. It is probable that no other white man had ever been honored in such a fashion.

No other white man was respected as highly by Indians. A letter to McCreight, written in 1957 by the Mohawk Aren Akweks and re-printed at the website manycoups.net demonstrated this vast admiration:

Mr. M. McCreight,
Sago Skenno-Kowa Tonikonrate, Brother:
Hogansburg, N. Y. Reservation.

Your Christmas greeting arrived here, and I have put it in our record book of the Akwesasne Mohawk Counselors so that our members can read your words and think on your thoughts. Brother, your message tells us that soon you will take the Sunset Trail where our ancient Fathers will welcome and greet you as one of themselves. It will make our hearts unhappy when you leave us....You will be remembered by the truths that you have written in your many books and articles about the Indians, our Fathers. Your words will be read by many and they will change the thoughts of many white folks who will read them. So, though your body may pass on, your thoughts will continue to live and speak for us...Always know that our hearts are with you...You are an INDIAN born again in a white body; quill sent here by our Creator to tell the world today the true story of our people. When you leave Mother Earth, you will return to your real self and our Ancient Ones will welcome you with outstretched arms. The prairies and forests will look golden and green to you and your moccasins will walk on smooth grasses. The

sky will be blue, and here and there from skin and bark lodges you will see smoke rising into the sky. Your ears will hear the good music of singing voices, which will blend with the tomtom music that belongs to this great Island. The faces you will see will be dark faces, and they will be smiling at you as you walk to greet them.

Remember this, Brother; this is how it will be for you.

Your brother,
Aren Akweks

In addition to the Indians, the Wigwam's collection attracted the attention of local youth. Bill Hand, a future guidance counselor at DuBois Area High School, recalled visiting the Wigwam as a teenager and meeting with the McCreights in a presentation to the DuBois Area Historical Society in 2002. The visit took place during the 1950s when the McCreights were approaching the end of their lives.

Hand, his older brother, and his brother's friend went to the Wigwam to see if they could do yard work to earn some money for a Saturday movie matinee.

"When we arrived at the Wigwam early Saturday morning, my friend's brother told us to wait at the foot of the steps, while he knocked on the door," recalled Hand. "Soon, an elderly lady opened the door and the older brother told her that we were there to help do the yard work. She smiled and told us to come up on the porch and sit while she went to get her husband. In short time, M. I. came out the door, smoking his pipe and began to tell us what jobs he wanted us to do. If we did a good job, he would pay us each 50 cents and there was a chance he would let us come in to the house to see all the Indian artifacts he had collected over the years. We agreed

to his offer and to tell the truth, the money was the top priority for all of us. We didn't have a clue as to what treasures were inside the Wigwam."

The boys set to work with M. I. and Alice watching from rocking chairs on the veranda. When they finished, M. I. was pleased with the effort and invited them to see his collection, but only after they washed-up and drank the lemonade Alice had made for them.

Hand described the tour, "Soon, we were ready to enter the Wigwam. We walked into a large room behind M. I. He stopped and said, 'I want to show you this first'. There were several large trunks and he opened one of them. What a smell! He reached in and pulled out a robe. He said it was an Indian Buffalo Robe that belonged to his friend and Indian chief, Flying Hawk, Chief of the Sioux nation. Now, he was getting our attention. I can still smell that aroma.

"Next to the trunks were other items, such as cavalry uniforms, with sabers and Indian lances. M. I. usually gave a brief account and background of each item. Our interest continued to mount.

"After viewing most of the items in the large room, we moved into a smaller room that was loaded with items. Many of the items were in glass cases under lock and key.

"Now the eyes were starting to get bigger and bigger. There were all types of weapons, headdresses, peace pipes, and many pictures on the walls. The stories got more interesting, particularly when he brought out the carbine that belonged to the famous Crazy Horse with which he killed General George Custer. He gave us the whole story.

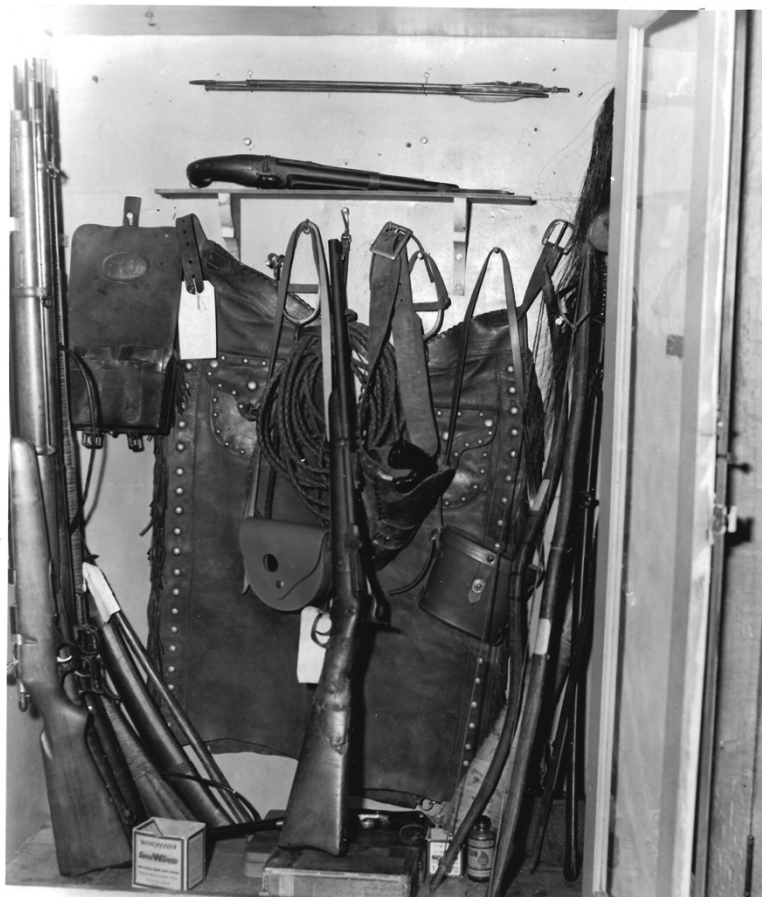
"Next, he brought out the tribal peace pipe that belonged to Sitting Bull and, again, gave us the background story. What a storyteller he was.

"Finally, it was time for us to leave. M. I. had some important things to do. He asked if we enjoyed the tour and if we would be interested in helping Alice put in her flower

gardens the following week. Maybe he would have time to finish the tour with more background stories.

"Yes - we would be there!"

The Major had other thoughts about the visits by young people to his home. In his later years he recalled, "A couple of the boys from town come swinging up the road to see the Indian things – they gaze at the cabinets of beadwork, pipes and war regalia – and then stall long at the varied items in the



The weapon display at the Wigwam.
DuBois Area Historical Society collection.

veranda sun-porch – guns and knives and bows and arrows – the sure indication that all boys linger longer at the firearms cabinet than all the rest of the far more valuable and interesting relics in the other sections. Why is it? Only the old instinct in all human beings – to shoot – to kill – the bloodthirsty element in the white man's make up."

M. I.'s grandson, R. A. Stumpf, recorded his own impressions of the tours, writing about just such a tour, "It was time to show the guests his large collection of Indian relics. I had seen Grandad go through his subtle histrionics many times before, but I tagged along through force of habit. There was no doubt that he was an authority on Indian lore since he himself was an adopted chief of the Sioux tribe. His wrinkled face had the appearance of a redman's but his stout body gave no such corresponding impression.

"His gruff voice boomed through the rooms of the massive house which long ago he had named "The Wigwam".

"No, that is my personal hunting rifle," he explained, "but the repeater next to it is the one that killed Custer." He said it in a matter-of-fact tone, but his eyes betrayed his pride.

"Such was his method of impressing his many visitors. The more they praised his valuable collection, the more he tried to discredit it as so much land-bound flotsam. I perceived that he got great delight out of this ruse. To further impress upon his callers how little he cared for these artifacts, he would let them wear a beautiful feathered war bonnet or colorful beaded moccasins. When the guests thanked him for showing them the historic articles, he modestly belittled his own efforts. However, after they left, he returned to his beloved relics and very gently returned each piece to its proper place."

Stumpf's impressions of his grandfather matched those of M. I.'s niece Dorothy Quinlan Waldsmith, who spent time with her uncle and aunt during their younger years. She described her uncle in this fashion, "Uncle Maj sounded, deliberately, gruff. He grunted, if a grunt would do.

Sometimes we'd get a bear hug to go with it. We never questioned our welcome. Aunt Alice had beautiful deep blue eyes and a smile that reflected their warmth. She was another dear aunt, who was 'My Mom,' too, while I was with the family. She never failed to remember some incident, usually funny, connected with each of us, and told it every time we appeared, with gusto. She always asked us how old we were, and quickly checked our answer with her own statistics, according to her children's birth dates, just to be sure we were right."

Israel and Alice were rightfully proud of the success of their children. In some of his last writings M. I. heaped the following praise on his offspring:

"Don is close to the heads of the mammoth Aluminum Company of America – handles more finance than his father ever did, owns his home in Crafton, wife is Grace Pifer and they have two daughters as fine as ever lived – one in Colombia S. C., the other wife of a prominent member of the management of ALCOA – and they live in New Kensington – own their own home. Catherine, next old to Don, lives in Franklin, wife of the D. D. Lutheran divine and is the most popular preacher's wife anywhere. Mother of three sons and one daughter – all making good. Bob flew the Hump in War II and also shot a bear in Alaska. Jim, one twin, comptroller of the largest lot of banks in the state of Florida – two sons, one daughter; eldest boy ensign in U. S. Navy – the other following, and the tall beautiful daughter near graduation – own their home. And Jack, another twin is head of a division in Aluminum C, at New Kensington plant – his wife Marion Billman, with one son and one daughter – she being a graduate in electric science and located in Sioux City – the son Jackie a draughtsman – they own the home in Oakmont, while M. I. McCreight, Jr. is dad of two sons – one in FBI at Washington

– the other in school – they own their home in New Kensington with Lucille Matthews as wife and mother – and making good.

“Martha, the youngest daughter, wife of F. G. Swisher, live at the Wigwam, best house and house-keeper in the region – one adopted daughter – wife of Craig Powers with one son.”

The front-page headline in the Monday, Oct. 13, 1958, *Courier-Express* read “Major I. McCreight, 94, Local Pioneer, Dies”. It was accompanied by a tag line declaring “Our First Citizen,” and a sub-headline “Began Conservation Program In Nation.” The headline included one mistake, M. I., was 93. His death came at 1:30 a.m.

Israel had been in failing health for nearly a year. He developed pneumonia approximately 10 days prior to his death.

Visitation and the funeral were conducted from the Wigwam surrounded by his collection of Indian artifacts.

A member of the Presbyterian Church, his funeral was conducted in the belief of that faith. Ironically, Israel did not attend a church. Alice and her children went to church until they were grown and gone. Then Alice attended alone until her hearing got so bad that she couldn’t make out music from preaching.

On the topic of religion, Israel wrote, “Our totem is that of an Alaska Indian Tribe; it proclaims their religion. That belief is founded on Nature; a law of the supreme, who created the world and all that is therein and thereon. The totem represents the Kadiak (sic) bear as the base – largest animal known – in America; the raven – the bird that flew the nearest to heaven – and the good spirit and bad spirit – all that exists between. The good and the bad spirit are represented by two frogs; the black one spewing out the green frog – the good throwing out

the bad. It is a sermon as good or better than most white preachers deliver.

“Lately, an Indian sent his credo; his guide in religion. And it follows:

‘Believes in many gods; but one Supreme Being who is everywhere all the time; whose help is needed continually, and might be secured by prayer and sacrifice.

‘In the immortality of the soul – its future determined by behavior in life.

‘Reverenced his body – the temple of his spirit. Short of Ancient Greece no equal in physical perfection.

‘In reverence to his parents; in old age; believes in sacredness of property; theft among them is unknown; in cleanliness of body; in purity of morals; in speaking the truth; his promise absolutely binding; falsehood an abomination. The noblest of virtues courage; believed that no fear of death would ever come to him; to put on his paint, sing his death song and meet the end in triumph.’

“That in religion is good enough for anyone! And the writer knew Indians well, perhaps as any white did – and believes just that as a good religion.”

One of M. I.’s children noted that his father, “Seemingly rejected Christianity or at least the organized church after witnessing starving Indians in the West as a young man. I believe he witnessed “benign neglect” of Indians by nominal Christians. But he always made up a card at Christmas-time with original poetry, sometimes mentioning God, Christ, or Wa-ne-tah, and mailed them to family members, at least.”

The funeral completed, Israel McCreight’s mortal remains, were interred in Morningside Cemetery.

Part 6: Legacy



**Alice and M. I.
McCreight at the
Wigwam in the
1940s.**

**DuBois Area Historical
Society collection.**

Alice Humphrey McCreight lived another six years following the loss of her husband of 72 years. She died on June 5, 1965, in the Presbyterian Home, Philipsburg, Pennsylvania. She was 97, had been a resident of DuBois for 75 years and had lived at the Wigwam for 60 years.

Alice was survived by her six remaining children, fourteen grandchildren, thirty-five great-grandchildren, and a great-great grandchild.

Both Israel and Alice now rest in Morningside Cemetery in DuBois.

Robert Stumpf on his website, summed up his grandmother, who he referred to as “The Duchess”. “She always walked straight even when bent over with age, if you get my

meaning,” he wrote. “Refined, but jolly. Punned a lot. Quick wit. Fine bridge player. Kept up on current events, naming cabinet members at age 90. Also keeping track of Rick Nelson at that age. Fantastic memory. Truly hospitable.

“It seemed to me that she related very well with young folk, giving advice in an almost subliminal manner so you didn’t know you were getting it.”



**Inside the Wigwam
in the 1940s.
DuBois Area Historical
Society Collection.**



**The interior of the Wigwam
prior to its demolition.
Note the stairs and fireplace
are in the photos on the
previous page.
Photos by Tom Schott**





The Wigwam had fallen into bad disrepair, as shown by front and back views, by the time it was torn down in 2013.

Photos by Tom Schott

A piece of DuBois' history fell to a wrecking crew on July 17, 2013, when the Wigwam, on what is now called Wigwam Drive was razed. The home had deteriorated and had been listed as a dangerous structure.

This writer and several members of the DuBois Area Historical Society had a chance to enter the Wigwam during the previous year. The building was in deplorable condition. Amazingly, the roof had held up fairly well. However, the floor in the living room had fallen in in the middle. Surprisingly, the second level floors were in better shape, after the once elegant but now shaky staircase was navigated. Restoration was essential, but virtually unaffordable.

It was with regret and a lot of nostalgia that this writer watched the demolition of the Wigwam and its colorful history.

The immense collection of Indian artifacts, once one of the largest collections in the eastern United States was already



Demolition of the Wigwam, July 17, 2013.

Photo by Tom Schott

long gone. After M. I.'s death, the collection was broken up and is now in several museums including the Smithsonian and in private collections in the U.S. and Canada.

Israel McCreight was and remains a complex and often misunderstood man, one who would be classified as eccentric in any time period.

On the website of Robert Stumpf, his grandson, appears an assessment from Robert's mother and Israel and Alice's daughter M. Catherine McCreight Sumpf: "(He/M. I.) . . . was an individualist and an honest man. No one understood him fully – even his own family."

Robert Stumpf offered the following evaluation, "My attempt at recollection: M.I.'s character – somewhat like what I've read and heard that Teddy Roosevelt was like. I think I remember Grandad using the word "Bully" when he approved of something or someone's actions. Rather gruff-seeming but a pushover for little kids. Usually remembered to give us grandchildren a nickel or dime. Fed chipmunks, etc. at his kitchen window at breakfast (or any other meal). Kept a pet fly one winter, wouldn't kill it!

"After World War II (he was fairly old by then) he asked me to get an ax in the roundhouse and cut down one part of a branched hickory tree for him. I did so in the heat of a summer afternoon while he sat up on the porch up on the hill watching me. When I finished and sat on the porch regaining my breath, he offered no thanks but said it had taken me twice as many swings of the ax than it should have!"

Perhaps the newspaper had it right in its obituary headline for Israel McCreight calling him, "DuBois' First Citizen."

Even now, over 60 years after his death, McCreight's legacy remains – often overlooked by current residents.

Physically, the Deposit Bank building he envisioned and built still stands, although it is abandoned by the banking industry. Two of his former residences, however, remain in use.

McCreight's efforts to boost the economy through railroads, mining, and support of general business, helped not only DuBois, but the entire area to grow and prosper. In keeping with his character, and following in his father's footsteps, Israel McCreight maintained a reputation for honesty.

The most permanent result of his efforts is Cook Forest, a state park still attracting thousands of visitors each year for camping, canoeing, hiking, horseback riding, and other outdoor activities. Many of the visitors walk the trail to the Forest Cathedral area that attracted McCreight's attention over a century ago.

Finally, there is Israel's greatest pride – Indian chief – an uncommon recognition for a Caucasian.

Most communities around the country would be proud to claim this type of "First Citizen" as one of their own.

Acknowledgements

Major The Life of Israel McCreight has had a much too long gestation. After arriving at the decision to pursue the work, I quickly found out (as I had suspected) that I knew virtually nothing about M. I. McCreight. That led to long periods of research, sporadic writing, and revising previous thoughts and ideas. The final product in your hands could not have been produced without a lot of help.

My wife, Virginia, was in the forefront in encouragement. It is wonderful to have your own in-house librarian for a project like this. Her skills led me to original and outside sources as well as being able to advise me on copyright and other issues. She also helped edit the final work. Two of her DuBois High School students, Nathan Weber and Caitlin Stanley, volunteered to conduct a microfilm search for McCreight information, which turned up some interesting facts.

The DuBois Area Historical Society waited patiently for me to complete this work. It is the repository of much McCreight information, including original documents donated by Rich Levine, most of McCreight's books, and many of the illustrations in this volume. Todd Thompson, the Society's historian and perhaps the person with the most knowledge of DuBois history, read the book in advance and offered many helpful suggestions.

During the duration of my work, the DuBois Public Library and its two head librarians, Leah Green and Rebecca McTavish along with their staff, shared the library's microfilm and photo files with me.

The Pennsylvania State Library and the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg provided me with access to information on President Theodore Roosevelt's original conservation policy and the papers of Governor John Fisher.

Chet Barnowski, Senior Advisor Native American Studies for Niagara Fall's Museum, provided information on items in McCreight's Indian collection that now reside in that museum.

Finally, at the last steps of this effort, Craig LaBue of LaBue Printing in DuBois offered guidance in completing the layout and printing of this work.

Tom Schott

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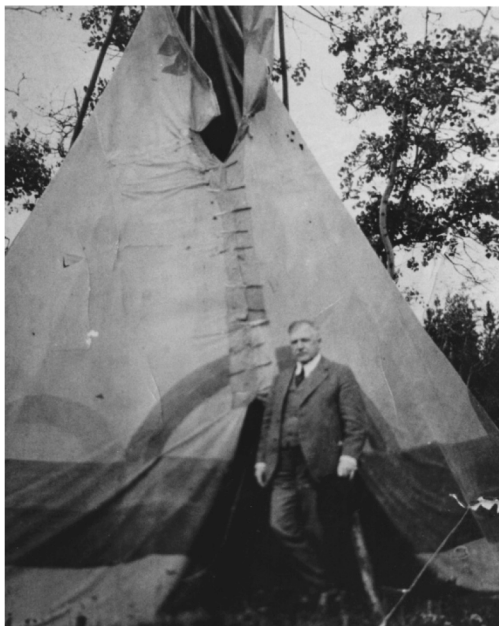
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Major Israel McCreight, born at the end of the Civil War in Reynoldsville, Pennsylvania, had an amazing life. Spending his formative years in what was then wilderness, he sought an education, went to the West looking for adventure, and ultimately became one of the developers of DuBois, Pennsylvania, through his banking and community interests, including helping to preserve the last remaining virgin timber standing in the area. But he always felt



his greatest achievement was becoming a chief of the Sioux Indians. This is Major Israel McCreight's incredible life.

Major

**The Life of Israel McCreight
Banker, Conservationist, Indian Chief
By Tom Schott**



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